

Is it permanent? (It's only a state of mind)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1618898) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1618898>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings , Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Marvel Cinematic Universe , Captain America (Movies) , The Avengers (Marvel Movies)
Relationship:	James "Bucky" Barnes/Steve Rogers
Character:	Steve Rogers , James "Bucky" Barnes , Natasha Romanov , Tony Stark , Bruce Banner , Thor (Marvel) , Sam Wilson (Marvel) , Clint Barton , Loki (Marvel)
Additional Tags:	Pre-Serum , Pre-Serum Steve Rogers , Memories , Memory Loss , Friends to Lovers , Captain America: The Winter Soldier Compliant , Post-Captain America: The Winter Soldier , Loki Does What He Wants , Post-Thor: The Dark World , Switching , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Slow Build , Non-Serum Steve Rogers/Winter Soldier Bucky Barnes Shrinkylinks
Stats:	Published: 2014-05-15 Completed: 2014-08-04 Chapters: 10/10 Words: 30647

Is it permanent? (It's only a state of mind)

by [sara_no_h](#)

Summary

Steve Rogers is hit with one of Loki's spells that changes his appearance. The Avengers are working on a cure and don't know what to do with their Captain. It's a good thing Bucky knows how to take care of *this* Steve.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

"Inside us there is something that has no name that something is what we are." - Jose Saramago

Natasha cornered him in the kitchen. "Don't freak out; Banner and Stark are going to fix it."

Those were not reassuring words for Bucky. He narrowed his eyes, seeing the mischievous light in her otherwise blank face. They were both assassins, but this was their home front and neither of them could carry the dead stare that was reserved for their missions and battles. All in all she was slipping, but then again so was he. Setting the bottle of water down he ran through a mental list of things that would worry him. It's a short list and he can already feel the colors around him darken.

"What happened to Steve?"

She blinked, unfazed by his hardened gaze and tensing shoulders. "He's alive and conscious in the labs. Loki stopped by and got him with some type of spell that's affecting him."

"Affecting him how?" He was already walking past her and turning to the elevator. "Why wasn't I called in?" The button is pressed with more force than necessary. Unease was building in his chest as he willed himself not to lash out and demand more information.

"Loki was here briefly. Apparently Stark and Rogers were the only two who saw him before he evaporated."

Irritation nudged at him. His metal hand flexed at his side. "Evaporated?"

The bell chimed, signaling the elevators arrival.

"Well he might have used apparition." She shrugged.

He snorted as he jammed the button for the labs; he ran a hand through the wisps of hair that had come loose from where he had tied it back. It was long, not something he would have preferred in the past but he'd grown to accept this new part of himself. Not quite Bucky but not the Soldier. That was his life now; an in-between. "I should have never let you convince me to read those books." Metal and flesh looped as he crossed his arms. The reckless Asgardian could have done anything to his friend. "Is it bad?"

"Only if you expect him to be doing anything Avengers related," her tone turned light, "or manual labor of any kind. That's why we're worried, plus the public fallout."

"What?" he asked, visions of Steve horribly disfigured crossing his mind. He shuddered, at the images his imagination created. His appearance wouldn't matter to him, only his wellbeing. "Is he in pain?"

She avoided his eye. "You should really see for yourself."

The metal doors opened and they made their way through the belly of Avengers tower. Bucky could feel the weight of apprehension and tried to resist it but this was Steve and that meant more than he could say aloud. If it was deviating then he would do anything to help him, no matter his

appearance or 'public fallout' some spell caused. Steve was his oldest friend and the one person who Bucky had found himself turning to more and more these last few months. He'd have nothing if it wasn't for Steve.

Natasha punched in her code, granting them access. They were greeted with the sight of Tony Stark hovering over a huge metal table, some type of cylinder device in hand. A privacy sheet was drawn over one of the medical beds. At the sight of that cover Bucky can feel his heartbeat double. He walked past Stark, completely deaf to the man's (most likely sarcastic) chatter as he pulls the sheet aside.

A blonde head shot up and Bucky's breathe caught.

"Hi," Steve said. His eyes looked tired; however, he managed to wave a thin wrist from the examination bed.

Wearing a too big *Captain America* shirt, Bucky suspected Stark had put it on him as a joke, was the 90-pound skinny kid that Sergeant James Barnes had walked away from at the entrance to the World's Fair back in 1942.

Without much though he asked, "I thought you were bigger."

Steve sent him a withering glare, but managed to hold his chin high. Bucky can't help the pride that welled in him at that sight. If Steve could pull off that defiance then he was better than he let on. Bucky ran his eyes over him and wonders if the asthma and his other ailments have returned along with the smaller frame and ever present spitfire attitude.

"So," Bucky paused, "did it hurt?"

Steve thought face twisting in discomfort as he recalled the memory. "A little."

"Is this going to be permanent?" he asked, felling a sense of déjà-vu but not being able to place it.

Steve stared at him, mouth twisted in a smile but his eyes were glossy, far away.

"Well," Stark physically came between them, "hopefully not." He put a device near Steve's upper chest, reading the vitals.

Bucky feels a twitch of something go through him at the sight. Even the short frame of Stark dwarfs Steve. Somewhere deep under all the layers of the Soldier he could feel the need to protect.

Sighing Tony withdrew the device, not looking up as he moved away. "Try not to rile him up too much. He already had an asthma attack when he started shrinking."

The concern was back. "You got him a shot of adrenalin, right?"

Tony gave him a baffled look. "This isn't the dark ages anymore, Barnes."

"It's called an inhaler." Steve said, holding up a small plastic object.

Bucky turned to face a bored looking Natasha. "So he was in pain?"

Rolling her eyes she shot Rogers an amused look. "He's alive. The list of defects just came with his new packaging or should we say old?"

Steve let out a long and shaky sigh before crossing his arms. "Bucky."

The tones send a shiver through him. He knew that attitude; he'd heard it more times than he could count. It was Steve's 'I'm-not-an-invalid' voice. Bucky was having none of that, though. It had led to nights huddled under paper thin blankets and fighting off fevers. He shook off the nostalgia and stared Steve down; there was no way he was going to let this guy out of his sight.

Crossing his arms to mirror the other he met that stubborn blue gaze head on. "Steven."

Stark's eyes bounced between them. "Cute."

Bucky felt a familiar frustration rising. Coincidentally, it happens every time he was around Howard's son. "If this is all from some spell how do *you* plan to fix it, huh?"

"Science goes hand in hand with magic or do you completely ignore Dr. Foster when she comes around the tower?"

The tension was back in his shoulders. "I don't give a damn what she says about magic." Bucky hated the fact it existed in their new lives. The element was unpredictable. It had crammed every one of his memories back into his head. At the same time. The Winter Soldiers and Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes were one and the same. It was because of that magic cube he spent the better part of this revelation in agony. It had forced him to remember and at the same time he was left with the excruciating task of rearranging his mind back into a functioning tool.

Tony stood his ground. "I've got this covered and I have a whole team ready to look after good old, Mini-Cap."

"No," Buck's face hardened, knowing what this was going to evolve into. "You're a mechanic, Stark. Banner specializes in gamma radiation."

"More than *your* mechanic and, hey, Bruce has a genius-level IQ," he paused for a moment before guesting to himself, "*I* have a genius-level IQ."

Bucky feared for his eyes and if they would roll out of his skull. He told himself to breathe.

Tony fiddled with his equipment on the side table, not paying the others much attention. "I might even give Erik Selvig a call; see what he has to say."

"Selvig is an astrophysicist." Buck had enough; they were not going to turn Steve into some kind of experiment. He turned and saw Steve's disapproving scowl before his eyes zeroed in on the purple blemishes.

He reached out with his flesh hand to gently grasp the bony limb. "Jesus, what you do to him, Stark?"

"They had to draw some blood." Steve said, pulling his arm away self-consciously. He tucked it against his side making him seem smaller. Bucky hated when he got like this.

"Some?" Tone searching for a fight.

"Ok, Robocop, you need to relax," Tony said, face surely, "he's fine. I need the blood to run some tests. Try not to shoot the doctor, yeah?"

Bucky gave him a look that, in his past, had bigger men falling to their knees in mercy.

Taking a step back Tony swallowed while going a curious shade of pale. Bucky mentally congratulated him for not breaking eye contact.

Steve looked between them before rising from the bed, hands out like a referee. “Guys, come on. This is not the time.”

“James,” Natasha cut in, taking pity on Steve’s attempt to moderate his team sans height, weight, and strength. “Why don’t you take Steve to his floor? He looks like he could use a sandwich.”

A warm hand was placed on his metal elbow making the sensors there hum. He had to look down to meet Steve’s concerned face and felt his shoulders ease. It was pathetic how quickly the anger melted away at the sight of those pleading blue eyes. It threw him back in time and suddenly he half expected to hear Jimmy Dorsey’s ‘Blue Champagne’ in the air.

He swallowed, a warm flutter spreading in his chest. Bucky shook the feeling away, he did not want to be regaining more memories in front of a curiously looking Stark.

As if reading his thoughts, Steve softened his face, tugged self-consciously at his too big shirt. “Let’s go upstairs. I could really use something to eat actually. Shrinking really makes a man famished.”

Bucky nodded causing Steve to take his hand away. The soldier momentarily felt a pang at the loss but instantly regretted it as his friend gave him a reassuring smile. He turned to follow, like always, and felt a strong urge to throw his arm around Steve’s shoulders; instead he stuffed his hands into his jeans, attempting to relax his suddenly too-tight muscles.

“Damn, Barnes, talk about kinks-Ouch!”

A smirk crossed his face. Thank you, Natalia, he thought. Bucky doesn’t have any desire to acknowledge Starks remark, not when his eyes are fixated on a familiar sight from his past.

Chapter 2

“Thanks for opening the jar.” Steve said, ducking his head bashfully.

Bucky grinned, flicking a hand in dismissal. “Don't worry about it.”

He watched Steve take a huge bite of the sandwich and allowed the smile to broaden; it was a novel sight after all. That skinny kid from Brooklyn didn't get much substance back in the day and seeing him get it now was a relief. If he ignored that fact that they were seventy plus year into the future and were very different men he would almost call this a fantasy. Bucky snatched a chip from the plate, only to get a slap for his troubles.

Chuckling he ran his eyes over those thin wrists before taking a bit. “You know, at least this time around we have all the food we could want.”

“I'm sure even if we had the food we wanted it wouldn't have done much for me,” he said, taking another mouthful.

“Yeah, you might have just ended up growing round instead of up.” Finished with his stolen chip Bucky rubbed his hands together, feeling restlessness under his skin. He can't shake the feeling that had been brushing against his mind. Once again his eyes take in the detail of the man before him. “How you holding up?”

Steve sighed, placing the sandwich aside. His eyes turned serious and Bucky felt himself straighten, interested peeked.

“Can I tell you somethin'?” His eyes skitter around the kitchen with uncertainty.

“Of course, Steve,” he leaned, “you can tell me anything. You know that.” It was a little thing, but he wanted to give to Steve what his friend had given to him. Bucky had confided in the other man more times than he could remember now. All his nightmares and panic attacks. Steve never judged, only helped to solidify the fact that everything he'd done in the last seventy years was not his fault.

Steve let out a breath. “Most night's I still dream about being like this,” he gestured to himself, “I mean, I've only had the serum in me for a handful of years. It can't make up for the fact that I was small from the beginning. Sometimes I feel like,” he breaks off into a humorless laugh, “it's only temporary, you know? Like I'll wake up one day and be back to normal. Be back to this. Ironic, right?”

He felt a familiar tug echo in his own mind. “Like it's going to end?”

“Yeah, and I'll be back to where I was.” Steve said as he observed Bucky with a curiosity expression.

Bucky felt the memories and couldn't help the burden they brought. “You're a soldier and you're waiting for the end of the war, you're waiting to be sent home.” Suddenly, he could see bloody cobblestone and a hunched over blonde figure surrounded by much bigger boys. He almost recoiled at the iron and rancid garbage smell that accommodated the memory. “To go back to being that lost kid from Brooklyn and getting beat up in alleyways.”

“Exactly like that, Buck.”

He dropped his eyes and focused on the hard modern marble countertop. He can't help that the words came out hollow. "But we're home now."

Steve replied with the same tone, "Yeah, I guess we are,"

*

The light was on in his room.

There was also a rustling.

Bucky popped his head in to see Steve on his hands and knees rummaging through *his* closet. His eyes are instantly drawn to the small slip of creamy flesh at his lower back. He cursed the oversize shirt for concealing the skin from his gaze. Then he mentally slapped himself for thinking such things about his oldest friend.

"What are you doing, Stevie?" he finally asked, entering the room fully only to be greeted with the spectacle of half his clothes on the floor. He released a string of profanities in Russian, causing Steve to straighten from his kneeling position.

Swiping his messy bangs aside he branded a shirt and jacket. "Everything in my closet's too big."

Bucky blinked. He could think of some shirts and pants that were just a little too tight on his frame. He almost confided in Natasha about the fact that most of Steve's clothes seemed to be painted on, but then figured he shouldn't mention things like that to the red headed spy. She might read too much into it and him. Then again she already had the uncanny advantage of reading him all too well.

"So you decided to go through my closet? It's not like I'm that much smaller than you, you know."

Steve threw him a cocky look before pulling off his shirt. "Let's find out."

Sweeping his gaze over the slight frame Bucky smiled, feeling a reminiscence rise within him. He could feel a sweltering summer heat and picture sitting on the stoop of a wooden staircase, backs against the cool bricks, lounging in the shade of the afternoon. He saw Steve turn to him, face wet with perspiration, and a carefree smile before they had bolted up the stairs, laughter falling from their lips like children as they wrestled to their door. He could remember the warm way their skin had touched, igniting a flame in him. It slammed into Bucky that this was the last summer before the war and before everything started to change, when they were still young and ignorant to the true cruelty of men.

He shook his head slightly; pushing aside the phantom heat of summer days past to watch Steve selected a blue shirt, one that had been slightly small on his own frame, before pulling it over his blonde head. It's big, but fits well enough.

Turning to him Steve spread out his hands. "What do ya think?"

He tried not to stare but a heat had begun to burn low in his belly at his memories. Seeing Steve in his clothes twisted something inside him, made him remember something lost past. It was a feeling he'd ignored for some time now.

Bucky caught the others curious look and scrambled to say something and not continue to stare at his friend like a starved animal who had just found a piece of beef. He allowed his gaze slip to the side. "Well, it don't matter because they ain't going to sell you liquor no matter what your license says."

Shit, he thought, and his eyes widened, it's not like Steve buys liquor!

Steve snorted anyways. "Jerk," he said as a shy grin settled over his lips as his cheeks turned a lovely hue.

Bucky can't stop the relieved quirk of his mouth. Reaching for the discarded jacket he threw it around the smaller man's shoulders, forcing himself not to let his hands linger. "Punk."

*

They decided to stay in and Bucky was grateful. They didn't need to go out and run into trouble. He could picture Steve trying to pick a fight and there was no way he was going to allow the little guy (he can't believe he just thought that) to do that to himself. He wasn't worried about people recognizing Steve as Captain America, not when he looked the way he did, but he was grateful they weren't going to risk it either.

The two of them had been on the couch for a few hours when the Bucky began noticing a shift. For some reason Steve sat a little too closely. They had never really worried about personal space but now it seemed like his friend couldn't help but sit *right* next to Bucky, thigh to thigh and side to side. It was distracting and his attention kept returning to the warmth Steve's small frame was radiating.

When Steve got up to retrieve his sketch book and sat *right* in the crook of Bucky's outstretched arm he almost balked at the lightheadedness that came with the nostalgia of it all. This whole situation reminded him of when they were younger, when the playful jostling and embraces came naturally, and when Steve was not so broad-shouldered and *huge*.

Damn it all, he thought, and slipped his arm around the other. If Steve wanted warmth he'd give it to him.

An affectionate feeling was spread in his chest but there was another one forming, a new feeling of illicit want that followed like a livewire. He pushed the latter aside and closed his eyes, listening to the accustomed sounds of pencil on paper as he felt the memory surface like a genial caress.

Frank Sinatra had been playing on the radio and he'd been humming along to it as he allowed the last of the lyrics to slip from his lips without thought, "*You bring a love so divine. All this is mine and heaven too.*"

A sly smile had slipped over his mouth as he looked up from his deck of cards to spy Steve concentrating extra hard on a particular sketch. "What are you drawin', Stevie?" he asked, curiosity curled in his belly as he cocked his head.

Humming in question Steve didn't budge; focused solely on his paper and pencil lines, occasionally he would glance out the window before going back to his paper.

Hoisting himself off the floor Bucky swayed toward his small hunched friend. Steve was leaning back in the wooden chair, eyes flickering outside before they quickly darted to the paper before him and not paying attention to the other's approach.

Glancing out the window Bucky saw that there was a dame, whose face was obscured by a floppy hat. She wore a pretty white and yellow sun dress as she stood by the neighboring building, talking to a fella through the first-floor window.

Bucky took in the scene for a moment before turning and his breathe caught. Steve was biting his lower lip; face contorted in concentration as the afternoon sun made his cheeks a pretty pink.

Catching himself before the thought could fully form he focused his gaze on the picture and felt his eyes widen.

The details to the dress were amazing, the shading and lines met in perfect harmony. "Gosh, that's damn fine work."

"Bucky!" Steve scolded, face scowling at the language.

The brunette laughed before sliding to the floor, head resting by the window sill. He looked up at Steve, trying not to stare too hard. "I'm just giving you a compliment, pal."

"You really think it's good?" he asked, bringing the pad down to his bony knees.

"Course I do," Bucky gestured to the paper, "I'm no artist or anythin' but I like it. We should hang it on the wall when you're all finished."

A smile light Steve's face and Bucky can't help but match it. "Thanks, Buck."

He blinked and he's back on the leather sofa with the sounds of *M*A*S*H* filling the living room. He felt the warm heat of Steve at his right side. Rolling his shoulders he sensed the metal of his left arm under the fabric of cotton. The smile slipped from his face as the memory leaves a longing in his chest. A forgotten memory that's been found; however, it should never should have been lost in the first place.

It was those memories that brought the homesickness, a deep yearning and regret for their past. Both of them had been cheated, living and breathing bodies only on the brink of their thirties and yet, completely out of their time.

They had been to war, fought the good fight like the soldiers they were created to be and here they were, seventy years in the future and still in the middle of just another battle. They never got to rest, he thought, never got to go home, not truly.

Looking down past the blonde head he saw the illustration Steve was absorbed in. It made the side of his mouth twist up. It was a drawing of their sock covered feet propped up on the glass table.

Simple and commonplace.

Everything they used to be.

No everything *he* used to be, he thought, as his eyes slip to the Captain's shield that was leaning against the living room wall. Steve would have always been more than that kid from Brooklyn who got beat up, Bucky knew this and now, now everyone saw it as well. Steve was always the sun while Bucky was the earth bound Icarus who suffered for his hubris.

It was fitting that he was the one who fell from that train all those years ago. Sadly, his death had not been at the rapids of waters tide, but at the hands of vile men who worked to erase him from existence.

Bucky pulled himself away from his melancholy to look at the nearly complete illustration. He's about to make a comment when the A.I of the tower made a soft chime before announcing:

"Sergeant Barnes, Captain Rogers it would seem that Dr. Banner and Mr. Stark are on their way."

Steve's face scrunched in question. "Did they tell you to give us a heads-up?"

"No, Sir, Sergeant Barnes has informed me that he wants to know if they selected your floor at any

time. I am fulfilling his command.” Came the clipped response.

He ignored Steve’s look of disbelief before shooting that room around them a smile. “Thanks for that, Jarvis.”

Reluctantly Bucky untangled himself from Steve, lifting an eyebrow he looked to the other in expectation. There was a flutter inside him. Maybe Steve was willing to give him a shin on why he’s become so touchy?

The blonde sighed, not even a little embarrassed at the action of snuggling up to his best friend. Steve met Bucky’s look before he shrugged. “You knew they would come looking for me eventually.”

I guess not, he thought.

“Let me talk to them,” mentally Bucky reviewed the locations of the guns he kept hidden before making his way to the elevator entrance. He reassured himself that it would not come to that, then again this was Tony Stark he was dealing with.

The elevator opened and out poured a sarcastic drawl. “Here they are: 80’s reject and mini-justice. What did I tell you, Bruce?”

In his peripheral Bucky saw Steve’s head slump from view. He could picture the younger man making himself look even more dwarfed by the cushions of the couch.

Bruce Banner gave him a tentative wave before making his way to the living room to stand before Steve. “Steven, I’m so sorry this happened.” he said, eyes taking in the new body before him.

“S’ok. I feel fine actually, normal even,” Steve said, shifting on the sofa.

Bucky watched Bruce step closer before adjusting his glasses, looking at Steve like he was some type of alien artifact before he started speaking softly to him. He would have listened in if it wasn’t for Stark sauntering up to him.

“You playing keeper to our fearless leader?”

Bucky could already feel the irritation simmer under his skin. He turned to face the other man, a look of annoyance over his features. “I’ve been treating him like a real human, if that’s what you mean.”

Tony threw his hands up in a gesture of mock surrender.

Banner was cautious, as if he was approaching a rabid animal. “We’re not here to turn anyone into an experiment, alright?” he looked to Steve, “we just want to help you get back what you lost.”

Bucky’s voice was hard, frustration bleeding through. “He hasn’t lost anything. Can’t you people see he’s the same; it’s just his appearance that’s changed.” He couldn’t see Steve’s face but he could picture the blonde’s understanding. Then again he might just be projecting.

Tony’s hand fell to Bucky’s forearm. “Exactly, that’s why we need to help. We want to get him back looking like good old Captain America.”

His gaze was hard. “Did you ever think to ask Steve about his needs?” Bucky shrugged the hand off, offended. “Do you think he wants to go back to being your show pony?”

“Bucky?!” Steve’s disgruntled face popping up over the couch.

Cursing he broke eye contact. He felt his face growing warm in anger. He could feel their eyes on him, waiting for an explanation. Suddenly his skin felt too tight and he heard the metal limb whirl in recalibration.

“Forget it.” He pushed his way past Stark to make his way to his room. It took every ounce of restraint to silently close the door before he slid down the barricade. Sitting on the plush carpet he allowed his head to fall to his raised knees as he tried to keep his breathing deep and even. He felt the wetness and the sting of tears and knew there was nothing he could do to stop them. The overwhelming irritation was still there but the flood of shame he felt exceeded it immensely.

I’m such an idiot, he thought.

Chapter 3

Hearing the click from the balcony Bucky quickly flicked the half-finished cigarette that had been hanging carelessly from his lips over the side railing. He watched the cherry red tip be swallowed by the black night as the glass door slid open.

“Hey, can I join you?” Steve asked.

He shrugged, glancing over his shoulder to see Steve trying to tame his wind tousled hair. He was wearing more layers and Bucky felt that white hot flash of desire at the sight of his jacket protecting Steve from the elements.

He cursed himself and ran a hand through his messy ponytail before turning to face Steve fully. He needed to stop thinking like that. He felt embarrassment creep up his cheeks and hoped Steve would believe it was from the chill. “Sorry about earlier, I was being an ass.”

Steve shook his head, voice like steel. “No, Buck, you got nothin’ to apologize for,” he let his gaze slip to the side in exasperation, “you’re not wrong.”

Bucky saw the weariness around those blue eyes and knew that his fuss was not in vain. Still his hands clenched in irritation; he knew Steve went to the labs, he’d heard him talking with the two scientists before leaving their shared floor. With the other gone Bucky had taken the chance to breathe in some nicotine in the hope that it would calm his coiled nerves.

He shoved his clenched fists into his pockets. “I just don’t want them treating you any different is all, they do it enough.” His right hand curled around the matchbook, feeling tension tighten his frame.

“I know. I’m used to it,” he sighed, eyes far away. “When I first met him Tony said everything special about me came from a bottle and that I was an experiment,” anger passing over his expression before it was replaced with an ever present patient’s, “I’d never been so offended in my life, but I knew he was wrong.”

A dark look settled over Bucky’s face, angry at the prospects of other’s bullying Steve; none of these people knew him. They don’t know that skinny kid with the list of ailments that wouldn’t back down from a fight, who had more honor than the sense of a hundred men. No, in this time they don’t know anything but what they saw and what they’ve read. They see a serum-enhanced body and ignored the soul inside; they ignore Steven Grant Rogers because they’re blind to the image of *Captain America*. It made Bucky sick and knowing that one of their *teammates* said that filled him with an immense rage. Stark was lucky he was out of sight. “If I had been there I would have *broken* his face.”

Steve wrapped his arms around himself as wind whipped past. “They try to understand and some of them do. I just thank God for Sam and Natasha,” he looked up, meeting Bucky’s, “and you.”

“I know you better than I know myself most of the time,” Bucky said it with sincerity. It did not stop the tension that twisted under his skin, though. It coiled inside him, wrapped itself around his muscles and bones. Seeing Steve like this brought too much back from his past. A need to protect and a need to finish what the blonde could not. He’d killed for him and he’d do it a hundred more times.

“I’ll always take you personally, Steve, it brings out the best in me. It’s the good inside me that you

bring out and without you-" he lets the words fade as panic rose in him. He almost let it slip. He cursed himself, shifting his weight as the other tried to catch his darting gaze.

"What is it, Bucky?" Steve whispered, arm coming out to grasp his wrist. His hand was cold but his face was open, a gentleness shining through. It was that concern for him, like Bucky was precious, like *he* was the only one in the world now. It broke him down, made him want to tell Steve everything.

It had taken months of intense conditioning from Sam and Natasha but he'd come to accept the fact that Steve saw beyond the shadows of his past.

Because this shadow stretched beyond the war.

The words poured out, slow and smooth over his tongue. "Back then, when bullies would pick on you, I hated them. I hated a lot of people," Bucky didn't look at Steve, not now, not when there's too much at risk, "I had this anger inside me, a darkness that was always there. I couldn't see much good, but you did. It was easy to ignore that anger and hate when you were there. Then the war happened and I accepted my role. I was a soldier and I had my orders. I killed for my country and I killed for Captain America, but then I fell."

Bucky paused and willed himself to find that blue gaze. "Sometimes I think it was because of my anger that they were able to break me, to make me into their weapon. To make me into the Winter Soldier."

Steve's brow furrowed as a range of emotions passed over his face. Bucky steeled himself for anything. "You believe that? That what the Winter Soldier was born from this anger inside you?"

Bucky shrugged, not even fully understanding it himself, but believing it. He can't help but see it deriving from him. Perhaps he was still seeking to place blame, to pin everything that his brainwashing had done on himself, on a flaw that was hidden in his own soul. "Maybe."

Shaking his head Steve gripped the wrist he was holding harder, anchoring Bucky. "You're a good man, Bucky." His voice was filled with resolve that was almost demanding. "Don't ever let yourself believe differently."

A sad grin crossed his face. That was not the first time someone insisted on his nature. He wanted to believe that more than anything, but it would never be him, not when the true righteous man was before him.

"You're the good man, Stevie."

"Just because you have the memories and emotions of the Winter Soldier does not mean everything good about James Barnes is gone. You're one and the same now. Believe me I see it. You're different. I like it," those blue eyes turned shy as he slowly extracted his hand from Bucky's wrist, "and I would not have it any other way."

Astonishment coursed through Bucky. Could Steve really see him as he was? Accept him for the man he'd been shaped into? He tried to keep his voice even. "Really?"

Steve's face was flushed and he shifted his weight. Finally he looked up at him from under his lashes. "You're my friend and that's all I can ask-all I need," Steve stuttered out.

Bucky narrowed his eyes; he knew the other was holding back. What did he want to say?

Steve's gaze was insane. It was a look Bucky was beginning to see more and more on his friends

face. It was something like contemplation but with more hesitation and fondness than anything else.

Hope rose through him like a spark to kindle. Could Steve feel the same? Did he want more as well? Was he afraid to ask for more that when they were?

Bucky opened his mouth to question only to see Steve's widen, eyes locked over his shoulder in surprise. Instinct perked he spun around only to see a distant bright light of color that emanated from the heavens.

With more befuddlement than he wanted to show he asked, "What the hell is that?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth the light quickly receded back into the night sky. "Thor's back." Steve said, gaze fixed on the spot in the distance where the bridge had landed. His gaze could cut glass. "He's going to give us some answers."

*

Steve and Bucky walked into the tower labs to see a mammoth of a man with a blood red cape surrounded by a portion of their team. Banner and Stark were nodding to something Thor was saying while Natasha stayed back, leaning against a metal table in her observation. She nodded to them as they entered.

Thor turned to them; hair falling just passed his shoulders as his eyes landed on the smaller stature of the Steve.

"Captain Rogers, is this truly a work of one of Loki's spells?" Thor asked. His brow furrowed in concern as he approached the other. Banner and Stark hung back, looks of apprehension over their features.

Bucky saw that the Asgardian nearly dwarfed Steve and felt a defensive possession race through him. He knew he was being paranoid, Thor is an Avenger, an ally, and one of Steve's closest friend's, but that did not stop the nagging need to protect, to stand a little bit closer to Steve.

Steve nodded, back military straight as he studied the Asgardian without a hint of intimidation. "Yeah, it was Loki. I thought, that is, you told us he was dead," he cocked his head, clearly not content to be lacking information. Thor nodded and Steve narrowed his eyes in suspicion. "You're not keeping things from us, are you?"

"I have not been in communication for some time and for that I am ashamed," he paused looking to a hovering Bucky with a look of deep regret, "I am sorry for what he has done to you as well."

Confusion colored his words. "What do you mean, I wasn't in the room; it was only Steve and Stark."

Thor shifted as a look of dishonor alters his handsome features. He turned to acknowledge the room. "There has been much mischief as of late, hidden and concealed until recently."

Tony snorted, arms crossing. "Makes sense. We take down Ultron, a real big baddy, sorry again guys," the room gave him a look, "while your brother comes crawling back from the dead." He spared a glance at an exasperated looking Bruce who was already looking a little green around the edges. of irritation with an exasperated looking Bruce who was already looking a little green around the edges.

Thor nodded to them. "Loki faked his death and played the part of my father, Odin, in secret. I did

not realize, not until I returned from our battle with Ultron. In that time he used his power to conceal and move the items we have accumulated these last few years. First it was the Aether, which is far away from here and in the hands of a man who is known to collect valuable and powerful artifacts. Then it was the Infinity Gauntlet,” Thor cast his gaze to the floor, “and then it was the Tesseract that was hidden.”

Natasha’s face had gone blank, a careful mask, but her body betrayed her anxiety as she straightened to attention. “The cube?”

Bucky stiffened in realization. The Tesseract was that vile cube? A shadow passed in his mind but he pushed it down, muting the rage.

“He’s moving the items in secret,” Steve said, face contorted in thought. The last time he’d seen it, it had been in his own hands. “But it vanished into thin air.”

“Aye, it was placed here on earth and that is why I am back,” his shoulders sagged, “it was concealed and it has already inflicted its powers on another.” His blue gaze looked up and locked with Bucky’s.

Panic volleyed through his veins and he’s helpless to the swelling feelings. “There’s no spell on me,” frantically Bucky tried to think but his mind was scattering. Magic. He hated the unnatural element. He felt Steve’s concerned gaze, but he ignored it. There were voices but he did not understand the words. A sudden feeling of entrapment overcomes him as his eyes take in the tower walls. Then he heard it, mind a whispering in Russian. Then in German and Slovak and Romanian.

“I’m not being controlled!” he yelled. He did not know what language it was delivered in.

No one moved but Bucky suddenly felt the weight of the room closing in.

“It is not a spell he has inflicted on you,” Thor whispered, “but it was your memories.”

Bucky can’t get the air to enter his lungs. He felt numbness settle along his muscles as his focus becomes blurry, white spots appear. He wants to say something but the words become lodged in his throat. He could only watch as Steve reached for him, but he did not feel the contact, nor was he aware of his knees buckling as he slammed to the floor.

*

He did not need to open his eyes to know that he was being held down. He felt the restraints that are across his chest and over his legs and arms. If he listened he could hear two distinct patterns of breathe that indicated there were two people in the room with him. He tried to reach for his metal arm and found it numb, unresponsive. It was his first weapon of choice and the limb was dead weight.

His breathing pattern changed in realization. There was only one person alive who knew how to disconnect the nerves and muscle responses to his metal arm.

Stark, he thought, he did this.

“Can you tell me where you are?” Natasha asked in Russian.

He responded in English. “New York, Avengers Tower.”

“What’s your name?” Sam Wilson asked. His voice indicated that he was much closer than Natasha, within arm’s reach on his right.

Bucky wondered if the other man realized that if he wanted, he could free himself and break Sam's neck at this proximity. It would be violent, sudden, and clinical. He shuddered, feeling repulsed at the picture his imagination created. "It's me, Bucky. Bucky Barnes." He paused as he heard the man sigh in relief.

"You have to be honest with me Sam," he squinted under the florescent lights, "did I faint?" It came out light, concealing the bundled energy within him.

He's beyond relieved; Sam and Natalia are the two people who understand him like this, they can help him at his worst and will always be his strength when the shadows of his past work to overwhelm him.

Chuckling Sam laid a hand over his forehead to push back his hair. He looked Bucky in the eye. "Sorry man, I wasn't there to witness your, I am assured," he raised an eyebrow at Natasha before looking back at Bucky, "very dramatic and manly faint."

Blinking under the shade of Sam's hand he released a gust of breathe. "Oh, good." He sends the man a reassuring smile before watching Natasha step closer, arms still wrapped around her person.

"Natalia, it's me, it's James." She was not going to immediately release him, not until she knew he was stable enough. He couldn't fault her instincts or caution.

She send Sam a look that had him stepping away, creating distance. "Do you know why you blacked out, James?"

He closed his eyes and he remembered the moment. Thor had been telling him that Loki had been the one who had instigated the return of the cube and therefore his memories. He'd become compromised, reverting back to the basic instinct of the Soldier. He couldn't help but lash out, to claim that he hadn't been controlled, how could he be? He'd never been in proximity to the crazy Asgardian. "Loki," he started, "Loki was the one who brought back my memories, but how? It was the cube, not him."

She brought her arms to her side. "No, it was the cube. He made sure that it was on earth and that Steve would be the one to use it."

His face contorted. "What?"

"You found us, Bucky, and you were angry." Sam said at his right.

Bucky knew this. The Soldier had been unremorseful in his revenge. He'd been proving to the remnants of Hydra and those who had controlled him just how much of a weapon he was. The Winter Soldier took no prisoners, only head shots. If they were lucky he would have been at a distance, but most of the time he chose to be at point blank. He enjoyed watching the light slip from their eyes. And the blood. The Soldier had taken an unnatural pleasure in feeling the warm drops of the iron liquid, like the rabid dog he'd become.

It was easy to recall the bodies of Hydra that he had scattered, faces contorted in agony. Coincidentally he'd created a trail for Steve, Natasha, and Sam to follow. Their search had lead them into his trap were the Soldier had been forced to confront them. With that the blonde man with the shield; however, he was no enemy, only an ex-target that was simply in the way. "Not at you," Bucky recalled, "it was Hydra. I-he was hunting them, you guys just happened to find me."

Bucky saw Natasha nod in understanding, eyes going distant. "We split up and Steve found the cube, said it had been hidden under the rubble. He didn't have a clue, but he'd been possessed,

believed it was the key to your memories.” She locked eyes back on him, watching and waiting to see his reaction, trying to read his emotions before he even felt them.

He swallowed. “He forced my hand; we fought and I grabbed it when I was trying to throw him off. Then I remembered,” and with that had come the agony and guilt, “and I wanted a bullet in my head and Steve wouldn't do it, no matter how much I begged.” He'd been horrified, lost and confused as two separate memories engulfed his mind. It was during that encounter when the Winter Solider died and Bucky Barnes awoken only to become neither in a bid for his sanity.

That had been nearly two years ago.

“You don't remember what happened to the cube?” She asked, already knowing the answer.

“I was a little occupied have a breakdown,” he deadpanned, “I never asked and you never told.”

She nodded. “It's understandable.”

“We knew you don't remember but we asked Steve,” Sam said, “he's telling us it was in his hands one minute and the next it was gone.”

“Thor is telling us something else,” Natasha leaned against the bed, “according to him it didn't just vanish into thin air like Steve assumed.” She looked to Sam who shook his head in exasperation. “Someone was controlling where it went.

“Magic,” Bucky said in realization. His head thudded against the bed.

Sam crossed his arms, face tight. “Yeah, ain't it a bitch.”

He shifted under the restraints. If magic had controlled the cube then there was only one being mischievous enough to screw with them like that. “It *was* Loki.” A shudder rippled through him. Loki wanted him to have his memories. But why?

“I don't see a difference between those nouns,” Natasha said flatly, reaching for the restraints at Bucky's chest. “Come on; let's get Stark to reconnect your arm. We still need find out why Loki's hiding these objects and why one of them was left for Steve to trigger you're memories.”

“Where's Steve?” Bucky asked watching Sam take out his phone. The man wasn't even bothering with the restrains; too busy checking whatever it was on his screen.

Sam indicated the phone in question. “Telling Thor everything he remembers and possibly getting an idea of what's going on. At least that's what Barton's telling me. Your boy does not know how to text, Nat.”

Releasing the last of the chest straps Natasha reached for the ones on his arms. “Clint's here?”

Sam shot Bucky an amused look. “He says Starks ready for you, Barnes.”

Bucky grunted in response, freeing his right arm before sitting up and beginning to help Natasha with the ones on his thighs.

The phone disappeared into Sam's pocket.

“Yeah, I knew you'd be thrilled.” He casually leaned back and observed the two people struggling to release the fastens. Sam raised an eyebrow and watched them tugging on the same lock but in different direction. Neither of them back down. All in all the two ex-assassins looked like they

were starting a tug-a-war. When this continued for more than was appropriate (given their age and lifestyles) they started speaking in rapid fire Russian to each other.

If this was his life now Sam was underwhelmed. “You know,” he started, “I always thought being an Avenger would be less team conflict and more team building.”

He received mutual looks of disgust for his comment.

Natasha won the tug-a-war because she was just that much *better*.

Chapter 4

Bucky shifted his arms through the cotton of the t-shirt and heard the clamor of Stark dropping his tools onto the workbench.

"Is it responding well?" Tony asked. It was just the two of them in the room, Sam and Natasha having met up with Barton to see if they could exchange data on the situation.

Bucky allowed the arm to perform a recalibration, tensing and releasing. There was a slight lag but nothing damaging. "Yeah, feels fine," he saw Tony studying the forearm with interest and thought now is a time to say the right thing, "thanks." He hoped Stark would read it as it was. He'd literally disarmed him when he'd been placed under a compromised situation. Not many people would have the bravery to do such a thing, unconscious or not.

He pushed the anger that welled up in him when he recalled what the man said to Steve. Now was not the time for that.

"Lag," Tony said it like he's documenting the fact for a science journal. Knowing him, he just might be. "I need to take a look under the hood."

Bucky didn't comment. Tony wanted a distraction and he wasn't going to find it in Bucky, not when there was too much happening. Not when new information was surfacing and making their lives that much more difficult. "Doesn't matter," Bucky stood, making his way to the elevator, "I gotta find Steve."

"Yeah, I bet you do," Tony muttered as he followed at his heels.

Bucky ignored the remark, entering the elevator with the shorter man.

"So," Tony began in a friendly voice, "I'm sorry about Loki manipulating Steve and forcing you to get bad touched by the cube." He sifted, indicating unease as he avoided looking at the other man Bucky. "I know how it feels to have a panic attack, man. Must have been pretty bad for you to blackout," There was something there, sentimentality and concern maybe, but Bucky didn't read into.

"Doesn't matter," he could feel the Soldier and allowed it to help him, focused him. He stood a little straighter than he normally would and centered his body weight. He had a mission. Steve came first and he needed to see for himself that the other was safe. Too much was happening. Bucky wanted him by his side if things became unpredictable. It's not that he couldn't trust his fellow Avengers to protect the no-longer super soldier; it's just that Steve was his priority, serum or no serum. Always had been and always will be. "We need to figure out why Loki wanted the cube on earth and why he had Steve use it on me in the first place."

Tony locked eyes with him through the mirrored doors. "I'm pretty sure that unless you find Loki and like, held him down with Thor's hammer, he's not gonna tell you squat," he broke the look and observed the inactive elevator, "why the hell aren't we moving?"

Bucky shoulders abruptly sagged, feeling heat at his neck. "I don't know where Steve is."

"Well it's a good thing Uncle Tony is here to save the day," he pressed the elevator button to the designated floor which just so happened to be the tower scientist.

This knowledge made Bucky pause; there was not much reason Steve would be there. "What's

Steve doing on Banner's floor?"

"Cooling down."

He tilted his head. "What?"

"Steve got a little hot-headed when Thor gave over the info on Loki. Apparently seeing you swoon and knowing that the cube was given to him by Loki made him a bit," Tony's face scrunched, "angry. Of course, seeing Steve yell at Thor was pretty damn comical in itself."

Bucky snorted. Something's never changed. "I can imagine."

"Seriously?" Tony asked, "but he's so *tiny*."

"Steve always went against guys that were twice his size." Bucky couldn't help but think it was something in his nature, that righteousness and foolishness coinciding for the greater good. Or in some cases getting idiot's to shut their gob in movie theaters.

"Sure, when he's got the muscles," he gestured with his hands, "but Thor's like twelve of him at the moment!"

Bucky shrugged. "It's not like Thor was going to do anything, he's his teammate." No, the two bulky blondes got along swimmingly. They could not be more out of place in this world and promptly formed a comradely that was based on their unfamiliarity of the time. Plus, Thor was making it his mission in life to find an Asgardian liquor to get Steve inebriated which made him an even bigger ally in Bucky's mind.

Stark nodded absently. "He's feeling pretty guilty too."

The elevator signaled their arrival and Bucky walked out to the sight of Bruce Banner pacing, glasses twirling from his loose hold. His hair looked like nervous fingers had been tugging on it. The scientist turned to look at them the same time Steve came out of the kitchen.

"Bucky," Steve called rushing to meet him only to stop at arm's length. An array of emotions crossed his face before it settled on a worried expression. "Bucky, are you alright?"

Bucky felt his lips twist, Steve was always thinking about others before himself. It was a damn good think he was here, Bucky thought. "I'm fine, just a mild relapse that lead to a blackout. All's still workin' in here," he gestured to his head.

The anxious look did not waver from Steve face, if anything it got worse. "You looked pretty lost for a moment. You fell," his eyes falling to the floor, "like a ton of bricks."

He remembered that the other reached for him in his moment of disorder, could picture it as if he was watching it through a haze of smoke. It was brief, but he thought he felt warm hands gripping him. "Did I hurt you?" He ignored Starks eye roll in his peripheral and focused on his friend, wishing they were alone.

"No," he said, a splash of color bloomed over his cheeks, "but I couldn't hold you up."

"I don't expect you to have the muscle for it now, pal," even if he was ashamed at his lack of strength Bucky still saw those worried blue eyes scanning him, checking to see if he, the Winter Soldier, was injured. It would be almost laughable if he didn't want to reach out and assure Steve. He didn't though. He was still too raw. To touch like he wanted to, in front of the other two, made him uneasy. His courage drained and he cramming his hands into his black jeans. "What about

you, did Loki really do something to make you pick up the cube.”

Willowy shoulders shrugged as his gaze bounced around, looking anywhere but at Bucky. “I don’t remember much. I mean, I saw the cube and I just knew I needed to keep it.”

“Like a flash?” Bruce asked, inching closer, hands limp at his sides. His face had drained of color.

“Yeah,” Steve began, arms crossing, “I knew what it was and I just had this feeling, like I needed to keep it because it would help me. The risk didn’t ever really register.”

Bruce and Tony exchanged a look. There was an array of emotions as they silently communicated. Bucky felt the unease build and Steve’s face turned frustrated.

“Was it painful enough to cause a headache?” Bruce had a glossy look in his eye, “a whispering or flutter of voices?” His right hand briefly touched his temple, as if he was remembering something that had happened before.

Bucky saw the dread that flashed across Steve’s face. “Yeah, it was something like that,” he shifted his body weight, “I had this image of me holding it out to Bucky, but that never happened.” He turned back to him now. “You grabbed it by mistake; I never got the chance to present it to you because you were trying to kill me.”

Bucky nodded before looking away. “Yeah, not really trying to kill you but sorry about that anyways,” he can’t remember much. It was all a hazy blur of blood, sweat, and angry limbs until his mind had gone mute, then came the onslaught of memories and with it his control on reality.

Steve steeled his face. “This is my fault; I never should have touched that cube.”

“I may have had a shitty time adjusting to my memories but it brought me back, Steve. You had to do it.” He brought his hands out of his pockets to gesture to himself. “You gave me a chance to find myself. I was counting on you and I didn’t even know it.”

“I know but,” Steve whispered, not looking at him again, “I was selfish.”

“No, you weren’t,” Bucky grabbed him, hand at the junction of neck and shoulder, a familiar motion, “you knew I was in there. You did what was needed so don’t go blamin’ yourself.” He released him but didn’t move away. “I’m more worried about why the cube was supposed to be found by you.”

“I still feel guilt, that’s never going to leave,” Steve’s tone was hard, burdened under his past sins.

“Steve-” Bucky began before the other stops him with a determined hand.

“No,” Steve said with finality, “I was selfish and you suffered. I was going to do anything to make you remember me and it almost broke you.”

The cold slap of shock hit him. He could only watch that handsome face sharpen in resolve, every inch the headstrong punk Bucky knew shining through.

At his peripheral Banner approached. “It sounds like the cube was given to you by Loki,” Bruce begins, exchanging a nervous look with Tony, “who planted the idea into your head that the cube would bring Barnes’ memories back. He wanted you to use it.”

Stark’s face contorted in concentration. “Exactly, Loki wanted you to use it, Steve. *You*. He was specific.”

Bucky ripped himself away from Steve to look at the scientist's. "We don't have all the facts. I got my memories and then he took the cube back. If Loki wanted Steve to use the cube," he found Tony's gaze, "then for what end? And why take it right back?"

"Thor says the cube is still on earth." Steve offered; face looking as lost as Bucky was feeling.

Bucky stilled, the last time he'd seen the Asgardian had been in the labs. He turned away for the group. "Where is he?"

"He's gone to find Loki," Steve had a hard look around his mouth.

Banner ran a hand through his hair. "In the meantime we wait."

"Yep," Tony said, shifting his weight to look at Steve, "and get you looking like yourself."

Steve looked exhausted but he managed to nod. "Right."

"Can't have you looking like an underfed asthmatic if we end up confronting the god of bitterness and green capes," Tony said, a thoughtful look on his face.

Bucky glanced at him and saw the anxious flutter underneath that weariness. He saw it on Bruce as well. Would they be able to get Steve back to his serum enhanced body?

Steve's eyes flick to Bucky before falling to the ground. "Yeah, I guess you're right, Tony."

*

It was late by the time they got back to their tower floor. Bucky heaved a sigh, exhaustion from the day's unwanted surprises. He knew Steve was feeling it more, if the slumped frame and dark circles under his eyes were any indication. "It's late," he glanced at the hanging clock, "Let's call it a night; nothing we can do now."

He saw his friend nod as he moved to the living room where he fell against the couch. Steve let out a long sigh, making him look boneless. Bucky can't help but feel the coiled muscle in his own frame subsiding, relaxing in sympathy. He read the unspoken look that Steve shot him and silently crossed the room to join him, grateful for an opportunity to be close.

The slight weight of Steve fell into his side and he instantly wrapped his arm around the other, tugging Steve that much closer. Closing his eyes Bucky tilted his head back and anticipated falling asleep right then and there, just like this. There was nowhere else he would rather be, he thought. He had everything he needed right within arm's reach.

"So," Steve's quiet voice said, "I had this idea and, it's stupid, I know, but do you wanna throw some pillows and blankets on the floor, like before?"

Bucky hummed in response. He knew what he was being asked and can't help squinting at the ceiling as a listless smile overcomes his face. "I don't know, feel like cleaning my boots?"

That earned him a bony elbow in the side; however, he saw Steve's bashful look and colored face. Reaching out Bucky ran his metal hand down the blonde's side, making Steve curl forward and away as a smile light his face. Bucky did it again as laughter finally erupted from him.

"Stop," he gasped out, trying to breathe through his giggling, "stop it! I mean-" Steve broke out into a full belly laugh that became just a little too breathless as he fell half into Bucky's lap.

Noticing the hitch in breathing Bucky withdrew his hand and placed it on the others back, feeling the enthusiastic rise and fall. This was there push and pull, a comfortable playfulness that had withstood the test of time stolen and lost.

“Takes me back, Stevie.”

There was long beat of silence that was broken by Steve’s breathing. When Steve spoke it was quite, “We don't have to,” but Bucky saw that blue gaze slip away as his hands fiddling with the end of his too big shirt. Steve was restless, unsure. “It was just a silly thought.”

Bucky’s smile was lazy as he rubbing circles into the fabric of Steve’s back through the loose shirt, wanting to reassure him through touch. “Doesn't mean I don't wanna.”

Reluctantly they untangled and gathered the pillows and blankets from their rooms to scatter them in front of the sofa, lying down with hardly a hand’s length away because they could. It really was like before and Bucky can’t help the longing that rose in his chest.

The hard carpeted floor should have been uncomfortable but they were soldiers, used to cots and even sleeping upright if need be. A carpeted floor was heaven compared to some places they had slept in. He maneuvered the lumpy feathered pillow beneath his head and turned to see Steve doing the same with his own, a small smile over his lips.

A little joy in the midst of their lives was good, Bucky thought, it didn't happen often enough. “You know, besides the fact that an Asgardain God had a hand in me gaining my memories back and he wanted you to use the cube it could be worse.”

“We don’t know everything,” Steve face contorted in thought. It reminded Bucky of the war, when he was the Captain strategizing over the territory maps of Nazi Germany. “Loki could be planning something, we just don't know what.”

Can’t make plans until they had more information, Bucky thought. If all went well Thor would come through. He did have a tendency to throttle the information out of his sibling, at least that is what Steve informed him about what happened before the battle of New York. It Thor succeeded they would establish a plan whatever was to come.

Steve was still concerned, if the hard set of his jaw was any indication. “He'll have to go through me if he wants you.”

“You thinking he’s got his sights on me?” Bucky asked, eyes bouncing to the ceiling. He was just as apprehensive he could admit an uncertainty lingered in the black of him mind. He had a strong need to distance himself from anything magical, but Buck didn't have control of this particular situation. None of them did. It was a waiting game, just like Bruce had said.

However, this didn't faze him; he was used to the wait. Bucky was prepared, there were safety features, mechanisms, and alarms throughout the tower. If Loki was to arrive unannounced they would know it.

And if Loki could trigger something in him, well, there were safety measures for that as well.

“He’s controlled men before, just look at Barton.”

Bucky knew what Steve was referring too. Clint had told him about his possession, how he's felt like he's been taken apart only to be remade. He's been unable to control his action or his thoughts, completely at the hands of a magic wielding space Viking that was hell bent on ruling the world. No matter how short Barton’s possession was it was still unnatural and lingered in his mind the

same way Bucky's memories did. So it was an understatement to say that Bucky could relate to such a man. That was how the archer came to be a friend and a facilitator to his recovery.

But he was stable now; Bucky could admit that to himself. In the beginning the memories had been agonizing, mind splintered and bent. He's been lost at the start and Steve could not have been farther from his mind. The burden of guilt he's felt and the anger at the other's unwillingness to kill him had left Bucky hollow. He couldn't turn to Steve, not when he was choking on blame. Bucky needed others, those who could understand what happened to him in the Red Room, those who had been victims of manipulation. He was a loaded weapon and needed a sure hand to disarm and rebuild him.

Mostly out of his mind and terrified of what he'd do Steve had lead him to meet Sam Wilson and Clint. With them came a familiar face from his past in the form of the beautiful Natalia. ("They know me as Natasha, James.") He's found his allies, his friends, the ones who understood him on an unimaginable level. With their conditioning and rehabilitation he was no longer the Asset. No, he slowly became a man again. Then he was James. He was his own man, rebuilt with new parts, literally in some sense, but still the same old James, buried under everything.

It had been a grueling eight months and when he finally returned he told Steve to call him Bucky, because that's who he was, a little rough around the edges, but still the same man that was and wanted to be Steve's best friend.

With that he'd settled, come to familiarize himself with the new world all with Steve at his side.

He opened his eyes, question on his tongue. "Why make a move now, not when I was vacant or unstable? Why wait until I've pulled myself together."

"I don't know," Steve said, a frustrated frown settling over his face.

Bucky can't find the words to respond. He's just worked past the triggers in his own conditioning, yes he'd slipped today, but that was a minor reflex, one he can attribute to his distrust in magic. It was bound to happen, even to the most level headed of individuals. He's been dragged through hell and no one could blame him from slipping back.

Everything pinpointed to magic.

It had been a long time since they had gone against anything as chaotic as Loki. It seemed that time passed slowly here and with that came a team comradery with the occasional interruption of a wanna be villain or arch enemy. This new information about the cube, the Tesseract, would be a test, something to take them out of their almost domesticity and into reality. Things had been too quiet since Ultron.

Dragging himself away from those thoughts he looked to see that Steve had shifted. Now the other man was lying on his side and Bucky could tell that his breathing had evened, those thin slacked shoulders rising at a steady pace that indicated sleep.

Bucky allowed his worry to ebb, eyes following the arch of that shirt covered back. He'd seen it a hundred times, just like this, and the realization pulled at something in his chest, making it tighten, making him want to reach out and touch. This was not the first time he's looked at Steve and felt this. Bucky could admit, at least inside his own mind, that it had been happening more and more.

Admiration was not so simple and Bucky gave that to Steve every second he could. He'd always end up following him, no matter his friends' superficial facade. Bucky allowed him to lead, even now, when complete autonomy was still new, still being tested at the most sporadic of times;

however he trusted Steve with his life. He knew in his messed up mind that he always had.

Even now, when his strongest memories of the blonde were that skinny kid who picked fights in back alleys didn't make up for the fact that Steve could handle anyone now, no matter their appearance. He was a leader, a Captain, and a hell of a lot stronger than Bucky could ever have imagined back in the war. Most of all Steve was his friend, his oldest and most trusted.

But that still didn't stop this other feeling.

He clamped his eyes shut. Irrational, Bucky thought, he was irrational when it came to Steve, that's all it was, nothing more. Just because his eyes lingered or his thoughts wondered to the feel of warm flesh did not take away from the respect he had for his friend.

He opened his eyes to stare at the body before him. There was nothing he wouldn't do to protect him. It wasn't Bucky's fault; he'd grown up finishing the kid's messes. It was his nature, even now when the need was rendered inadequate.

Besides, he found ways to stay close, keep himself useful during the war and now in this modern world. That's how he found himself at the high point, often lying opposite Barton, taking aim at anyone who dared to approach their Captain's blind spot. He made sure no one hit that bulls-eye Steve carried, not while Bucky breathed.

No, It was easy for Bucky to give him the admiration he'd always shown, that along with their easy banter had them right back at where they left off. It was unexpected how easy it was to fall back into the role of friend. Besides, Steve had enough to contend with and he didn't need Bucky being irrational or stupid or in love with him now.

Bucky sucked in a breath.

No.

He couldn't be.

Glancing at Steve once again he took in the shape of his side, no longer a gladiator of a man but dwarfed, the compact man he was a long, long time ago. Bucky listened to the slightly raspy sound of Steve's breathe, from the fluid that lingered in his lungs, and closed his eyes. He pictured their old apartment with the mismatched curtains that framed the window that had refused to fully close. It was a distant memory of before, but those always came easier when he was around Steve.

He remembered that pale wrist shading a window, a hat, a yellow sun dress, but his eyes were on Steve's mouth, watching as he bit his lower lip in concentration.

He remembered Steve smiling, sweat dripped from sun heated skin as they found shelter in the shade of their building. The wooden stairs cracked as they jostled and Bucky's heart beat like a race horse at how easily their skin slid together and he suddenly felt warm for a very different reason than summer heat.

He remembers Steve pulling on his shirt, the one he wears now, and the protectiveness and rightness that it ignited in him.

He sifted closer, allowing an inch of separation as his eyes followed the shape of Steve's neck and shoulder. The shirt was loose and showed a splash of flawless skin.

Yes, he wanted Steve. The thought made him go hot and cold all at once and his mind frantically tried to arrange itself with this awareness.

The need to place his lips on that exposed flesh made him tremble, heart beat tripling as the image of his lips on that smooth skin came to him. His lips parted in want as he leaned forward and stilled.

Steve was his oldest friend; these new feelings had no place between them before so why now? Bucky's feeling may have changed but that didn't mean that Steve's did.

He couldn't be selfish and ask for something the other didn't feel. Steve didn't need that, didn't need Bucky's budding desire directed at him, not when there was so many more complications in their world.

Captain America had a responsibility to his people and he, Bucky, The Winter Soldier, whoever was in the blank parts of his mind, could not interfere.

He ducked his head away as the black hole of guilt settled in his chest, making his face burn and his eyes sting. Chest tightening he shifted to lie on his back. It's not like Steve would ever want him in that way, could never see him as anything but good ol' Bucky. No, his friend could have his pick of lovers, why would he want to settle for a broken man who could barely remember his own identity?

They were friends and that was till the end.

It was selfish to want more when Steve could never give. Not when Bucky was already sharing him with the world. Bucky had his memories, the one thing he'd been granted that could be a blessing and a curse. When it came to Steve they were a beacon, his hope. He remembered warm summers in Brooklyn a hundred years ago; he remembered nights without meals, the leaky roof, and the fear of fever that had left Steve weaker than a newborn kitten.

It was like his memories had come to life today and this Steve, this willowy sprout with the fluid in his lungs and a list of ailments would never be anyone else's concern but Bucky's. This gave him a small comfort. Yes, he could still love him but in his own way. He can resist temptation and give everything he could into their friendship.

Closing his eyes he willed his sleep to be dreamless and without memory.

His mind rebelled.

Bucky dreams of winter nights when the chill would creep into a broken window with mismatched curtains while holding a cool cloth over a fever warmed forehead.

*

Bucky jolted awake with apprehension and a nagging need to buy a ham bone for the soup, something to help Steve with his fever. But how would he pay...

He blinked.

A huge black plasma screen television was mounted on the wall and to his left is an expensive looking leather sofa. No, he's not in that rundown apartment and it's not 1939.

He glanced down to see that Steve was still asleep and the urge to reach out and feel the other's forehead was overwhelming. He didn't hesitate. Feeling that sleep warm skin was reassuring. His flesh hand lingered, pushing aside yellow bangs to watch the uneven rhythm of his breathing.

Bucky's fingers outlined Steve's face but in his mind he saw his lips replacing those rough pads.

To kiss down Steve temple and meet that soft looking mouth with his own. He wanted to run his tongue along that bottom lip before sucking on it, creating a rhythm that would have Steve moaning and running his hands through Buck's shoulder length hair. He wanted to feel those nails digging into him as he discovered very single spot on Steve that made him gasp and shudder.

He felt himself on the verge of ducking his head, of fulfilling everything his mind was fabrication. The pull was unbearable, breaking through every single one of his inhibitions. All Bucky had to do was lean down and take.

"Buck?" Steve called in a sleepy rasp, shifting under those lingering fingers, glossy eyes squinting open.

Bucky shushed him, mind scrambling as he felt his face burning. "S'fine," he said and quickly moved his thumb away from the other lips. He knew it crossed a line but he needed.

Holding his breathe Bucky brushed his lips against that scrunched forehead. A sentimental gesture that Bucky hoped Steve would believe. "Go back to sleep," he breathed out, watching a content smile settle over Steve's face as those long eyelashes shut.

Humming Steve's face slacked in contentment and Bucky could only look at him in wonder.

Suddenly the room was too small and his hands clenched. He felt the stab of guilt like a rusty knife in his lungs. Already Steve's breathing had evened, completely unaware of the turmoil happening inside Bucky.

Steve trusted him and here Bucky was, giving into his basic desire. He felt his breath still at that. He can't allow himself to do this; he can't lose his best friend, not to unwanted affection.

It physically hurt to extract himself from the other, but he needed to get out, so he ignored the thud under his ribs as he left the other to an undisturbed sleep. He had to leave, he thought, had to remove himself before he made an unforgivable mistake.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The moment the elevator doors opened to the gym he was greeted with the all-knowing glower of the Widow. To her immediate right was the more welcoming and cheerful face of Sam. Bucky almost cursed his luck aloud instead he gave them both a glower, now even remotely prepared for their prying.

He can't see anyone else but he heard a distant tinny voice that belonged to some type of modern pop singer. It sounded like the noise was playing far too loudly out of someone's headphones.

Clint must be on the second level somewhere either asleep or with his hearing aid not properly tuned. This comes at a bit of a surprise to him considering the archer is never willing to be in the vicinity of the gym this early.

He gazed in the direction of the sound and felt rather than saw Natasha roll her eyes. She must have forced the poor man to be here and it looked like her coercing was in vain.

"You're early," she greeted, eyes sweeping his figure with purpose before narrowing in suspicion, "how much sleep did you get?"

"Good morning to you as well," he deliberately turned to a grinning Sam, "how'd you know I was on my way?"

"Nat got Jarvis to tell us when you left your floor," amusement colored Sam's voice as his eyes darted to the instigator.

"Yeah, that's not a sign of a stalker." Bucky knew she'd become more conscious of his movements, but using the tower A.I was new low and a little bit rude.

"Someone's got to keep tabs. I certainly don't trust Stark's security. People want us dead and our name is literally written on the side of the building," Natasha shrugged never wavering in her justification. Her words turned thoughtful, "I was serious about the sleep, James."

"You sleep when you blackout, right?"

She frowned. "You look exhausted."

"I thought I looked sexy," he threw Sam a crooked grin. Wasn't the disheveled look popular? It seemed like all the kids on the streets of New York looked like this. Of course they probably weren't pledged by memories or worried about demi-gods ruining their lives.

Dropping his jovial demeanor Sam shifted, a tightness settled around his eyes. Was he also afraid for Bucky? Did they think he was going to have a relapse and blackout? If they were anxious then they must see something in him. Steve didn't seem to be worried, but then again the blonde was always stupid when it came to him.

"I get it. You're worried about a megalomaniac and a little blue cube. A lot of guys around here aren't very happy about that." Sam said.

"That's my life," Bucky deadpanned.

Natasha headed for the main ring, picking up her gym bag in the process. “We’re running blind.”

Bucky’s gaze followed her. She was right, she was always right. They didn’t know half of what they needed to know and the other half was foggy at most. “We are.”

“We’ve been doing it most of our lives,” she said consciously, “can’t stop now, not while we’re already on the ground.”

“Speak for yourself,” Sam throws over his shoulder before stepping closer to Bucky expression shifting, “How’s Steve?”

“Vulnerable,” It’s instantaneous. There was no denying the truth; Steve was no match for Loki, let alone anything else the god decided to throw at him. They haven’t been doing much since the “incident” but that could change at any moment. Even now he felt the need to be closer, just in case, but at the same time that raw feeling in his chest made him weak. He can’t do that to Steve, he can’t be vulnerable when he was supposed to be strong. He needed to lock those emotions away, bury them, just like he did when the bad memories become too much.

Sam gave him an unimpressed look. “Besides his appearance.”

“I don’t know,” he said, moving with Sam towards the practicing ring. Bucky can’t get inside Steve’s head, but he wanted to believe Steve felt just as lost. “Kid’s always been headstrong. Wants answers just like me.” His hand runs over the bottom rope of the ring, eyes following the motion. “Steve thought that Loki might try to control me with the cube.”

Natasha turned from rummaging in her bag. “Like Barton?”

Bucky nods feeling movement from above. Simultaneously he and Natasha turned to see the sleep tousled figure of the man in question. He must have heard his name through that awful music after all.

Clint wore a tired expression but his eyes were alert. For some reason he wore a multitude of bandages, indicating that he’d been in a scuffle of some sort. There were even a few over his neck and face.

Bucky winced in sympathy, it’s not Clint had any abnormal healing abilities. He was just a guy with a bow, killer aim, and most of all, a friend. “You look like shit, Barton.”

“Aw, Barnes,” Clint began, hand scratching a bandage at his cheek, “You say the sweetest things.”

“Seriously?”

Clint shrugged, looking indifferent at a peeling bandage over his arm. “I fell on some guy’s car.”

Bucky felt a twitch as his lip. “What you started to believe you got wings?” He shared a smile with Sam.

Clint dangled over the side railing, eyes narrowing. Must have not had his coffee yet., Bucky thought.

“Bro, you need to learn to keep your trap shut, someone’s gunna slug you.”

“Who,” an exaggerated look of shock crossed Bucky’s face, “you?”

The archer’s eyes turned fiery, judging the distance between the floors, debating if he was willing

to throw himself down or just give Barnes the one finger salute. Bucky saw the internal debate going on in the cranky bowman and allowed a grin to flash over his face.

“Boys,” Natasha called, not finding the banter amusing or productive.

Her serious look was lost when Sam let out a boisterous laugh, his radiant smile shifting between the first and second floors. “It’s always good to see us getting along.”

Bucky huffed, hardly surprised at the interjection. He and Clint had always been like this. Both had far too much sarcasm and a presumptuous nature that always seemed to lead them into trouble.

The bowman turned serious as he leaned over the railing, feet kicking out through the gaps. “I don’t think Loki’s going to try and control you. He only took the cube, right?” Barton shrugged in indifference, “Maybe your memories were just a bonus.”

The thought threw Bucky. “A bonus?”

Clint waved a hand in the air. “I never said it was a nice bonus.”

Sam grimaced in agreement. “True.”

“We don’t deal with nice people.” Natasha supplied as she climbed into the ring.

Clint was still watching Bucky with intent while Natasha began bandaging her hands. “No, I think you got your memories because Steve wanted you to have them.”

Bucky knew this now. Steve had said as much. He had needed Bucky to remember, to bring a part of him back. “Ok, go on.”

“So, Loki gets Steve to use the cube knowing Steve wants you to have your memories. So, he uses it on you and bam-,” his fist meets his open palm, “memories. Then Loki takes the Tesseract back to his secret hideout and I don’t know, plays with it?” Clint’ said before he trailed off into a giggle.

Natasha and Sam make eye contact, a silent communication and mutual understanding. Clint was a child.

Bucky didn't see, too occupied with the thought of Steve being the catalyst. “But why Steve? Why does he have to be the one to use the cube?” Was it because it had been around before? When Hydra was still under the orders of the man with the red face? God, Steve was never going to stay out of trouble, he thought.

Natasha leaned against the ropes, hands bandaged and ready for sparring. “That is *the* question, James.”

“Rogers is a hell of a guy.” Sam mused aloud.

Bucky’s mind haltered. He wanted to agree, to say that Steve was the best but that word was too ordinary. No, his friend was a lot of things but he was more exceptional than they could understand. Bucky had known him most of his life, his real life, and never once could find a simple singular word to describe how amazing Steve was. “He’s rare,” he finally said, “I’ve never met anyone like him. He’s,” Bucky searched for the word but he couldn't place a name to it and so he settled, “different. No unique.”

“It’s because we all want to be like him,” Clint said thoughtfully. Natasha’s head whips around and the archer turns sheepish. “It’s because he’s frekin’ Captain America, Mr. I-Always-Do-The-

Right-Thing-Here-Let-Me-Rub-Some-Of-My-Goodness-On-You! I mean, he's got the whole," he gestured wildly with his hands and nearly tipped over the railing. Sam started laughing and Natasha cracked a smile; clearly enjoying the roundabout way of Clint's description.

Bucky could only agree. Being with Steve always brought the best out of you. It did it for him and no matter how muddled his perception got, Steve was the light at the end of that tunnel.

Gaining control of his flailing limbs Clint straightened. "Anyways," he shrugged the topic aside, "which one of you losers is going to spar with Nat?"

Her eyes danced giving him a blatant once over. "Why? Planning on taking on the winner?"

Clint blinked. "Aw, yeah, no, because we all know you're going to win. I'll take the guy who gets beat up first." He looked pointedly at Sam, "Don't worry Wilson; she said she'd go easy on you."

Natasha smirked from the center of the ring. "I don't care which one of you idiots is first; I'm going to kick all you're asses and it's not even half past six."

"Yeah, thanks for that." Sam said, looking to Bucky with only a hint of apprehension. He held out his fist.

Sighing Bucky mirrored Sam's position. They shook three times and the end result was paper and scissors.

Graciously, Bucky was able to remain in the practicing ring for an impressive seven minutes and three seconds straight before his back hit the mat, pinned.

Natalia always did manage to amaze him.

*

"Feeling comfortable?" Stark asked, pocketing his aviator sunglasses and looking pointed at Steve who just so happened to have been resting his head in Bucky's lap.

Rogers just shrugged from his relaxed position; however, Bucky glared, not pleased that his alerts from Jarvis had been muted. He'd had to have word with the A.I when Stark left. It was situations like these he'd hoped to avoid.

Steve and him had been lounging, watching some movies and taking advantage of the sanctuary of the afternoon, the fact that Steve had slipped from his side to rest his head on the pillow in Bucky's lap had just been a reaction to the tiredness that a lazy afternoon inspired.

He was removing his hand from that blonde hair when he saw Steve's relaxed expression turn annoyed and couldn't help but agree. Bucky had been enjoying himself.

"Yeah, not like that couch can hold seven people or anything," Tony muttered before looking around the room and touching random things. "So, Steve, a little hawk told me you were going to go to the park later."

Steve ignored the gab and remained in his position. "Can't stay cooped up in this tower forever."

"You know, pollen and dust can give someone a hell of an asthma attack. Also pollution comes from cars, trucks--"

Bucky sighed inward, half agreeing with what Tony was saying; nevertheless, he knew Steve was

not going to take the man's coddling, not when he barely tolerated Bucky's. Steve finally cracked an eye open. "Yes, Tony, I still have the inhaler. I know it must be hilarious for you if I go too far and lose the ability to breathe."

"Just leave him alone, Stark." Bucky said, following the finely dressed man with his eyes. It seemed he was in constant motion, fiddling with his cuff, rubbing at his neck, and looking around their living room for imaginary threats. Bucky narrowed his eyes. Was Tony always this fidgety?

Tony was now looking at the shield that was propped up against the wall. He whipped his head around, face anxious. "Hey, I'm looking out for you here! We've been without our leader," Steve sends him an unimpressed look, "proper leader?" he finished awkwardly.

Steve's eyes narrowed. "You can't follow me because I can't bench press--"

Tony cut him off, counting off his fingers. "Sprint down the street, jump out of windows, do a little hand to hand--"

Bucky blinked feeling the tension that shot through Steve's shoulders. He saw the moment the smaller man snapped and when that irritation transformed into anger.

Steve was off the sofa in an instant, face twisted in fury as he stood before Stark. "Spit it out, Tony."

Stark stared in shock at the blonde man, completely taken off balance at this miniature version of Captain America that looked ready to sock him in the jaw. Bucky could feel the pride welling, it would be good for Stark's ego if Steve decided to sock him.

Tony held his hands out in surrender. "Look, I'm worried. It's been almost thirteen days here and I'm seriously afraid you're going to catch the flu and leave us under the command of Comrade over there," Tony pointed a finger in Bucky's direction. "I got to tell you, I don't look good with heavy eyeliner. Pepper's already told me."

The joke fell flat and Steve just continued to glare. After a beat Tony's face fell as did his shoulders. "Bruce and I got bumpkiss."

Bucky expect shock but he just felt tired. He'd already assumed they would reach a dead end, it's not like they could cure magic after all. Bucky looked to Steve and saw a thoughtful expression over his face. He wondered what the other man was thinking. Was he also underwhelmed? After a moment he asked, "So now what?"

He eyed Bucky before turning back to Steve. "So, you're stuck like this."

Steve slowly nodded. "Ok."

"But," Starks face turned optimistic, "and this was a big one, I was thinking maybe we can see if Thor's got some healers or something on Asgard."

Bucky frowned. "Healers?"

Tony looked over to him. "Like doctors but with magic," then back to Steve, "but maybe they can undo the spell?"

Steve considered it for a moment, shoulders loosening. "It might work. I mean, they do know their magic in Asgard."

“We’ll have to wait until he gets back,” Tony’s hands settled as his hips.

“When’s that?” Steve asked.

Tony looked to his watch. “He checked in with Director Coulson. He should be here in a day or so.” His tone turned serious once again but his eyes were soft. “We need you back, Cap. You keep us strong.”

Sighing Steve crossed his arms. “I’m here now.”

“I know. The urge to make you your own suit is kind of been nagging at me. I might have the blueprints ready. Just in case.”

Steve looked astonished. “Seriously?”

Bucky’s breathe caught. To say he was perplexed at the implication was an understatement. Who knew Tony had it in him?

“If we get called out we’re not leaving you behind,” Stark’s tone was absolute.

“Thank you, Tony.”

Straightening Stark ran a hand through his hair before fiddling with his sunglasses. “Don’t mention it; you gotta keep Barnes from turning irrational.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Bucky and Steve said simultaneously.

Tony snorted looking between them before settling on Steve. “Barnes keeps you happy, I like it when our teams happy. Look around you; I built each floor for everyone’s specific taste. Your floor was designed for you and all your twenty-first century additions were made friendly. I also made adjustments for your Russian boyfriend over there!” Bucky gives Tony and unimpressed look, “Now, we can’t have someone giving little Stevie a bruise and suddenly,” he slid on his sunglasses and Bucky felt the need to hit him for being so pretentious; “winter is coming.”

Steve snorted. “That’s never been funny, Tony.”

“Um, no, it’s actually hilarious.” Tony tilted his head, a smirk crossing his face.

Bucky’s eyes narrowed. “You got it backwards, pal.”

“What?” Tony’s face scrunched.

Steve smiled before ducking his head like he knew what was coming.

“I,” Bucky said as he stood and threw an arm around a red-faced Steve, “keep this one out of trouble.”

Steve slid his own arm around Bucky’s waist as he gave a mock scowl. “I have no idea what he’s talking about.”

“Please, he’s always been the one gettin’ me into fights,” Bucky looked down and saw Steve’s face trying to hold back an enormous grin. He pinches his friend’s neck and Steve released a laugh.

“Ok, ok, maybe I got you into a little trouble.” Steve mumbled through lips that were trying to restrain a smile.

Bucky gave him an unbelievable look. "A little?" He could name more than a dozen times he's followed his foolhardy friend into danger and that was before the war! Hell, it was all in one summer. "It's my job keeping him safe," he said looking to Steve, "till the end of the line."

Steve beamed and pinched Bucky in the side, causing both of them to trouble into a fit of laughter. Stark just stared before rolling his eyes and walking himself out.

"Oh, God, senior citizen love," Stark grimaced behind his sunglasses, "it's so sentimental!"

They ignored the groan from behind them; too busy grinning like the idiots they were

Chapter End Notes

I love Hawkeye. The comic, the character, the arrows...it's all good.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The park had been warm and Steve had been fine, no thanks to the worry of Stark. They'd found a nice little spot in the shade so Steve wouldn't burn and watched the people wandering around. Bucky had dozed on the soft blanket while his friend drew in his sketchbook, grumbling about the fact he couldn't see the colors as clearly. Still, it had been peaceful, a quiet comfort that had been happening ever since Steve had lost his height and super-human strength. Bucky wouldn't trade these moments for the world, a thought he hoped Steve could share.

But these moments were a nostalgic reminder of their past; that's where the bulk of these times would always remain. Bucky knew that and so he took what he could. Soon the peaceful times would pass and the adrenaline would be back, pumping through them as perspiration dripped from their brows as they brawled with another would be villain. So were their lives now. A never ending battle.

Bucky silently prayed that Steve would be safe, an act he hardly believed in but knew the other would appreciate all the same. It had been happening more and more. It was the need to protect, especially now when Steve was more vulnerable.

When the sun had begun to set and a chill crept into the air they headed back to the tower, smiling and joking along the way.

Entering their floor Steve had put his art supplies away before going up to his shield. Bucky saw him and was about to make a wisecrack but halted at the other's solemn look. Steve hoisted the shield off its hook and ran his hand over the surface, nail catching on a paint chip. "Do you really think it'll all work out?" Steve asked in quiet voice.

Bucky was taken aback but he collected himself after a moment. "Sure I do, gotta be positive about this sort of thing." He cringed knowing it sounded weak. He wasn't good at consoling, never had to be. That was Steve's area of expertise, even before the war. If all else failed Bucky knew he could lecture Steve on not doing anything drastic, keep the other man from doing something reckless.

Steve didn't respond at first, eyes fixated on the shield, the symbol of who he was, a protector and honorable man with a heart of gold. "The world needs Captain America."

Bucky sighed, knowing this was bound to come up. It was only a matter of time before Steve became restless, wanting to do more despite being physically incapable. "You may have the title and shield, Steve, but you don't have to fight, not now, not when you're back to yourself again." Bucky could image the feeling of being trapped in your own body, bound to something that wasn't fully you. He glanced at his metal arm, something he'd come to accept but remained a constant reminder.

"I know I just need to do something more. I can't sit around and draw all the time." There was frustration in Steve's voice as a miserable look crossed his face.

"Why not?" Steve looked up at that, "Why not enjoy it? This is the first time since the war that you've been free of responsibility. Take this chance and be yourself."

Steve looked hopeless. "No one wants that--"

"I do. I finally have you all to myself now. I want you no matter how you look," Bucky stilled, shock filling him at his confession. He saw those blue eyes widen and cursed himself and his damn feelings. He was slipping, revealing everything to Steve. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Fumbling he tried to recover himself, "You know this. I'd take you over Captain America any day," he finished awkwardly, eyes darting around as he suddenly felt warm all over.

Bucky jolted back to himself when he saw Steve straighten, shield falling lip to his side. The other man was looking up at him with a look of wonder. It was blinding, making the air catch in Bucky's chest while his heartbeat tripled. It was a considering look. Examining. Feeling raw Bucky shuffled his feet before breaking eye contact, "Not that you're very different or anything, I just," he abruptly changed tactics, "just forget it, I want some grub. You up for spaghetti?"

Steve's face fell, shutting down as his shoulders dropped.

Bucky tried to keep himself from fidgeting but the disappointment slammed through him, making him flinch. He'd fucked up. He'd seen Steve's affection but he could not reciprocate in words. He knew he was a coward, unwilling to put a voice to the feelings that boiled inside him. He was a coward.

Steve looked lost but managed a quite response. "Sure."

Without another word Bucky turned on his heel. With every step away from Steve he felt the flames of shame licking at his boots. The urge to hide was almost overwhelming but he ignored it in favor of the kitchen, intending to gather his thoughts and calm his racing heart. He approached the threshold and stilled, sensing another. Slowly, he entered the room only to pause at the sight that greeted him.

Thor was leaning against his kitchen counter sans cape and looking fixatedly at the coffee maker, studying it as if it was a wild beast ready to strike. Bucky could admit it was a monstrosity of a thing, but not something he'd ever seen Thor unsettled by.

Finally those green eyes swept over to him and Bucky almost recoiled at the intensity they held. His mind raced as the hairs at the back of his neck stood on end, instinct sending out alert bells. Something wasn't right.

Silently Steve appeared at his side taking in the scene. The smaller man drew an arm across Bucky's middle and Bucky almost laughed at the image they made before realizing that Steve must be feeling the same inauspicious feeling he was.

Thor's attention fell on Steve and Bucky knew it was all wrong.

"You don't lean," Steve started, eyes boring into the Asgardian before him.

"What are you saying?" Thor asked, brow furrowing, "perhaps you've just never seen me do it." He spread his thick arms out in proclamation. The gesture seemed exaggerated; too much thought went into the motion.

"And I may not have the best vision at the moment," Steve took a step in front of him and Bucky almost grabbed him, "but you don't have eyes that shade, *Thor*."

Bucky drew in a gasp, eyes narrowing as he gave into the urge and gripped the back of Steve shirt. "Loki."

A green light shimmered and the very god appeared with a look of indifference over his face. "So observant."

Steve's voice was rigid. "What are you doing here?"

Loki cocked his head and watched the man, considering. "Think of this as a test."

Bucky saw red, but Steve was quicker. "How dare you!" he yelled, and hurled the shield at his side. It was a surprising show of force; however, it didn't get far, not when it stilled mid-air.

Stunned the two men could only watch as the shield hovered before it began to spin like a top. Buck saw the instant Loki released it and covered Steve as it whizzed above their heads, embedding itself into the wall behind them. Staying close to his friend he allowed his rage to fall on Loki, wanting to tear the man apart but at the same time he wanted to keep Steve and himself as far away from the god as possible.

"Is that how you treat those who come to grant you a warning," Loki said in amusement, "I come without armor or weapon."

"Like we would *ever* trust you." Steve said, mouth a hard line as he stood, still covering Bucky.

Loki turned to Bucky and Steve grew taunt, "You, the gem impressed upon you and here you are," green eyes dancing with mirth, "alive and whole."

Bucky coiled inward at that. Loathing seeped from the other side of him, where the Soldier resided. That cube had been his undoing; Inundating his conscious with every memory from every life that had been programmed into him. Knowing that this man before him had instigated that enraged him. "You broke me!" he yelled.

It was silent but for his shallow inhaleds as Bucky continued to cling to Steve's shirt, as an anchor or restraint, he couldn't tell. Loki straightened abruptly, watching the brunette, dissecting his thoughts with an abrasive stare. Bucky could almost feel the phantom touch to his mind, a caress that was uninvited. He knew he had the right to be paranoid. The fragile seems that held them together beginning to rip at in his left hand as he tried to keep his breathing level. An integrated instinct endeavored to overcome, but he shoved it down, grounding himself with his hold on Steve.

Loki tilted his head, a self-satisfied quirk crossed his lips. "I helped to fix you. A 'thank you' would be sufficient, mortal. Then again I don't expect much from a man like you. *Him* other the other hand," another shift in Loki's attention, almost like a viper, head bobbing from side to side, assessing his prey, waiting to attack.

"What about me, Loki?"

There was no hesitation from Steve and it was almost enough to make Bucky break out into hysterical laughter. Steve's inability to back down never ceased to amaze him. The man would always take on the bullies, no matter his size because his bravery was in his spirit, not in his muscle mass.

"You touched the cube and were selfless. Is that not reason enough?" Loki questioned, a perplexed look that seemed exaggerated crossed his face. "Can't you see the Tesseract has the power to change people, make them desire things beyond them? But here you are, selfless, only in want of a fallen friend."

Steve unclenched his jaw. "No, I did what you made me. You put the cube in my hands."

Loki tilted his head in dismissal. "I may have moved it within your sights and given you an encouraging thought or two but I never forced you to pick it up," those meticulous eyes studied Steve, "and you surprised me, something that is not easily done. I was expecting you to find your

way to a different world, like that red faced demon.”

Bucky recoiled, but Steve’s face confused before it morphed into disbelief. “Schmidt?”

Pushing himself off the counter Loki examined a fruit bowl. “Yes, he’s found himself in the otherworld. I don’t believe he’ll have an easy time returning to this planet, if at all,” thin pale fingers picked at the fruit before pulling a green apple out, observing the way the light hit the surface, “he’s gone quite mad.”

Bucky’s eyes widened, mind filtering through scenarios, one of which would send Steve to another planet because of his friends reckless desire to get him back. It didn’t help that Loki had anticipated Steve to fail. The thought made him sick. Rage boiled in his blood and a darker desire surfaced making him tighten his grip on Steve. Steve must have sensed this because he turned to him, silently communicating reassurance. Bucky knew it that moment that the other needed him to stay calm. “You wanted me gone?” Steve said, more to Bucky than the intruder.

Loki shook his head, rubbing the apple on his sleeve before a dagger appeared in his other hand. “No, no, I was simply testing a theory. If you so happened to make your way to a different world, who was I to stop it?”

Bucky’s eyes were on the dagger, not impressed by the display of magic. “No weapons, huh?” Loki threw him a smirk and Bucky’s eyes skidded to the knife block, which held ten very sharp and very deadly culinary tools of various sizes that he was happily envisioning shoving through the god’s throat.

“Theory?” Steve asked, staying calm as he gathered information, wanting to get what he could from Loki while the other man was here and not attacking them.

“I’ve seen many things.” Loki sounded calm, spinning the tale effortlessly off the tip of his silver tongue. Carefully the dagger’s edge was placed on the skin of the apple were it proceeded to strip the skin from the flesh.

Steve’s eyes narrowed at the action. “I’ll bet.”

“I make deals you know, contracts and bargaining,” the blade continued, never faltering as the string of green looped past Loki’s fingers and wrist, “I get what I want at the time I want it. I can bend and twist my fate to whatever I need; however,” he paused and the knife cut too thin causing the loop of skin to fall onto the tile floor, “I came across someone who I cannot bend to my will.”

“Such a shame that.”

Loki made a face at jab, eyes sweeping the Captain before the dagger disappeared just as quickly as it appeared. “Thor has told you of my deeds, moving the artifacts? But he’s ignorant. They are much more than relics. They hold the key to the future.”

Steve nodded, watching Loki take a bite of the apple. “Like the Tesseract.”

“Yes,” Loki’s eyes widened, chewing softly before he shifted his stance, “but the Titan.”

Steve was confused. “Titan?”

“One that does not serve himself but that of his Lady Death.” Loki held the apple out, examining it as he pursed his lips.

Dry sarcasm rolled off his tongue. “She doesn’t sound like much fun.”

“No she is not,” Loki’s sounded exhausted, something that had Steve sharing another look with a silent but tense Bucky. “She’s coming and bringing her Titan. He will take the life of an Avenger, if not all of you mortals.” Both men looked up at that, shocked. There was a pause before Loki’s face darkened, tone stiff as he fought his own inner conflicts. “Others will look for their own glories.”

"People wanting us dead?" Bucky's voice was rough, burdened under his restraint, “nothing new there.”

“These are no mere people,” Loki gave him a look of pity, “you should watch your friend more closely before-”

Steve cut in. “Why me? Why did you choose me?”

Bucky noticed and his eyes narrowed at Steve’s back. Was he stopping Loki from admitting a grave truth or silencing the other from a falsehood?

“Because of what’s inside you.” Loki said it like it was an obvious solution.

Steve needed more. “The serum?”

“No, what resides in all of you Midgardians. It has no name it simply exists. You can try to label it but it doesn't matter. Words are too simple,” Loki took a step forward and so did Steve, uncaring at Bucky's grip on his shirt.

Loki’s eyes bore into him, almost as if he wanted Roger’s to understand the weight of the unknown future. “You might be the one to push back the universe that he threatens to unleash with the Infinity Gauntlet.”

Steve faltered, not expecting that, not from Loki, not from the enemy. But the god continued eyes full of a waning mischief that concealed a daunting reality. “I’m just curious to see if a mortal man, well, mostly mortal, can shatter the gems.”

“What do you mean?” Steve looked angry even when he sounded lost.

“You’ll find out for yourself.” Loki said taking a step back before disappearing with no noise or indication he’d been there at all.

Bucky blinked and cursed at the empty space where Loki had stood. He released his grip on Steve only to watch his friend fall to his knees, a look of pain crossing his features. He could only watch in helpless panic as Steve's form shifted, becoming what the serum had made him.

Chapter End Notes

I know Tom Hiddleston has blue eyes but Loki is supposed to have GREEN eyes....grrr.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Revisions have been made to chapter 1-6. I added and changed a few things to give the story a little bit more longing on Bucky's part. *sigh*

Bucky was making his way through another pack of cigarettes. There was no more worry about the smell or smoke and how it could affect Steve. He indulged and tried not to think about the other man too much.

That didn't stop the melancholy, though. If anything Steve being back to his old body brought them back to square one.

Why was he feeling like this? Bucky should be grateful for his friend. He was back to his serum improved healthy body, superhuman strength. All the bells and whistles worked. Everyone was grateful. They were so grateful that they were throwing a freaking party inside. On the *top* floor. Stark's ego inflated Avengers lounge with all the amber liquid, music, and food one could dream about.

With his metal hand he crushed the bud and reached for his pack only to have them swiped away.

Natasha stored the square in her jacket before sitting down on the concrete balcony with him. "He's asking for you, you know."

Bucky don't need to ask who.

Steve must have finally noticed he'd gone, leaving the blonde with his super friends and their gallons of alcohol. "Why? It's not like he needs my help anymore." He flicked the remnants of the cigarette and watched it roll over the ledge.

"Maybe he just needs you to keep Stark and Banner away from him."

He snorted and linked his hands, metal and flesh before him. He knew they wanted to run every test under the sun on Steve. As painful as the transformation had been Steve came out fine, more energetic than anything. His friend had been adamant about sharing the information Loki had delivered, astonishing a newly arrived Thor and the rest of their team. It has been comical to watch Bruce and Tony perform the scans and tests while a fidgeting Steve told them of the gems and the mysterious Titan, something none of them had imagined.

The thought made Bucky uneasy but he'd continued to stand at the sidelines, making sure that Steve truly was healthy while the other's dissected everything that had transpired. Making theories and trading ideas. Once the scans were completed and Steve was given the all clear Bucky had slipped away, letting Steve retell the details of Loki's cryptic and abrupt arrival.

Natasha jolted his arm to get his attention, bringing him back to the present. "Stark is still impressed that 'The Winter Soldier' had the patients to take care of the ninety pounds of asthmatic justice."

Bucky could hear the air-quotes she used around his assassins alias and felt his eyes roll. "I've

been doing this since we were kids. I know how to take care of Steve more than anyone. Besides, it's never been about the way he looks." He fiddled with the threads of his jacket, debating whether to say what he thought. To expose his feelings to this woman who was his past. This was Natasha before him, open faced and understanding in all matters. Without her he would not be the man he was today. He let out a breath. "If anything he sometimes shocks me looking the way he does now, tall and muscular," his voice trailed off, "the perfect image of Captain America."

"You don't like it?"

Bucky never care about the packaging, he just wanted his friend. "That's not it. I've always known he was bigger than life itself. I'm used to him standing up to bullies and stupid people. He's always had too much heart and spirit crammed inside him. With the serum it just helped to match the inside."

She nodded in understanding. "Now everyone sees him like you do."

"Yeah, everyone wants to be Captain America's friend now." His mouth twisted in disgust.

Her voice was soft as she looked at him. "He only wants one friend, James."

"I don't want Captain America. I gotta share him and that's not something I think I could do. Might end up killin' some people," he paused in consideration, "accidentally."

A grin slipped over her red lips. "I know what you mean."

He let out a sigh, longing making him weak. "I just want Steve."

"For a man who can shoot a sniper rifle in a blizzard and still make the kill shot you're completely blind."

"What?" he asked, and gave her an incredibly look.

She eyed him up, considering. "Steve wants you just as much as you do."

He scoffed. "You can't know that." But his chest tightened at the idea. He remembered the conversation he and Steve had on this very balcony and the awkward exchange after the park.

Hope rushed through his belly, making his hands clench. There was so much left unspoken, too afraid to voice his desires.

"Idiot," she uttered fondly, "trust me on this. I see the way he makes eyes at you."

"He's makin' eyes at me, Natalia?" He cocked his head curiously at the thought, trying to place when that could have happened. He understood he might be doing it but the other? It's not like he ever looked at him to closely. Sure there was that half-smile and look of pride but that was something he'd always seen.

Well, at least ever since Bucky come back to him.

"Yeah, about the same time you're doing it right back." She playfully pushed him. "I'm aware of when you do it, you know."

He felt the heat over his face and ducked his head. Apparently his affection had not gone unnoticed by her clever eyes. Then again she would know, being on the reciprocating end of his affection at one time.

Her voice turned serious. “Don't be stupid, James.”

That made him look up and he allowed a slow grin to cross his face. That was as much a blessing as any. “How can I be? He’s taken all the stupid with him.”

She gave him a bright smile and patterned him on the shoulder before hoisting herself up. “Go talk to your Captain, soldier. That’s an order.”

Bucky’s eyes followed her, bravery blooming in his chest. “Says who?”

“Barton and I. Now go before Stark coerces Steve back into the labs.” She slipped the balcony door open.

He frowned. “Barton knows?”

She threw him a look over her shoulder. “Of course he knows. I tell him everything.”

He watched the glass door close and let out a deep breath.

Bucky knew what he needed to do now.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

The horror of the tense change. I want to thank [shanachie](#). They were my stealthy beta reader for this part. They are awesome and took the brunt of the work and I'm beyond grateful!

Sorry for the delay. A lot happened.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bucky found Steve hovering by the counter with the various beverages that were mostly alcoholic and therefore useless to his friend; however, that did not stop him from awkwardly holding a champagne flute between his long fingers. Bucky saw Steve's blue eyes light up and those massive shoulders straighten as he turned to him.

"I was looking for you," he greeted, and gestured to the table, "got a lot of good stuff here. At least that's what they tell me."

Bucky's eyes swept the bottles and raised a brow, impressed at the selection. Stark never held back when it came to his liquor that was for damn sure. He was tempted but he hardened his resolve; he had a mission.

Meeting the hopeful and questioning gaze before him he sent out a reassuring smile that he hoped did not look forced. "Yeah, I needed a smoke."

Steve nodded in understanding before taking a sip from his flute. Bucky watched the motion and almost laughed out loud at the ridiculously small crystal pinched between those fingers. Steve saw and sent him a sheepish smile. "Thor keeps apologizing but I think he's just happy knowing Loki's alive and giving out cryptic warnings." Steve made a face. "It's really disturbing how he talks about his brother."

Not fully understanding that comment but not caring, Bucky touched Steve's arm. "Let's go to our floor, this place has got too many people." He instantly regretted the words when he saw Steve tense, worry filling the other man's face.

"Are you alright?" he asked, setting down his glass. He turned to face Bucky fully, concern clouding that handsome face and Bucky knew he had to stop him before Steve jumped to the wrong conclusion.

Stuffing his hands into his pockets, Bucky sighed. "I'm fine. I just need to talk to you in private is all."

Steve watched him; a look of uncertainty crossing his features before he placed the glass down and leading them to the exit.

The elevator ride was short. Bucky kept his hands stiffened in his jeans while his eyes avoided Steve's. He was uncertain about what he was going to say but knew he had to confess, do what Natasha said and hope for the best, while anticipating the worst.

Steve stood close, close enough that Bucky could feel his warmth. He didn't have to look at Steve to know his face was tight, curious but clueless as to what Bucky was about to do. He could only hope that Steve would hear him out because maybe his feelings were reciprocated. Maybe Steve had struggled like he did, wanting but never allowing himself to cross that delicate line between friend and something more.

They exited almost at the same time, causing Steve to smile, sweeping out an arm like a gentlemen. Scowling Bucky shoved passed him, getting a quiet chuckle from his friend at the motion. It was familiar, safe, something that they had been doing ever since they could remember.

Would it be like this if things changed, Bucky thought, coming to lean against the back of the couch. Joking and laughing while stealing kisses and holding hands. Would that be them? Bucky cringed at the image. It's not like Steve was some dame, no, he was so much more; something grounding and safe. Steve knew him before everything happened and he was coming to know him now. He could never be Natasha, but he empathetic and compassionate, everything Bucky needed him to be. He just needed Steve to love him that much more; to reciprocate the ache that Bucky felt every time the other man looked at him.

A pang shot through him when he saw the playful look dissolve from Steve's face. "So," he began, looking at the floor before throwing Bucky a small hopeful smile, "what's up?"

"About earlier," Bucky stopped, reeling himself, mind wandering back to the conversation after the park, when Steve had given him that blinding look of wonder when Bucky said he'd want Steve no matter his physical appearance. "You know that, right? That it's never been about the way you look. Not even now."

Steve took a step closer, coming to stand in front of Bucky. "Of course I do." He was thoughtful for a moment and then said, "You told me as much before; said you'd follow that little guy from Brooklyn anywhere."

Bucky felt his mouth rise at the memory but his eyes were far away. "You've always been my friend even when I didn't know who I was. Even after I put three bullets in you, you never backed down. You stood by that belief."

Steve looked like he wanted to reach out and touch, reassure Bucky, but his hands fell to his hips. "I knew you were in there; you just needed to me to remind you," he took a deep breath, "I got on the Helicarrier and I knew I was either going to save you or let you kill me. That was the choice I made and nothing was going to stop me." Steve paused, watching Bucky, his face the picture of fortitude.

Bucky brushed the shock aside to snort, feeling the need to hit Steve, maybe that would knock some of the stupid out of him. "You and your self-sacrificing nature, Rogers, I swear to God."

"Might have to go to confession for that," Steve deadpanned.

Bucky shook his head at the tone, a grin crossing his lips. "There's a lot I'd be goin' to confession for."

Steve was serious for a moment before he broke out into a laugh, eyes far away. It was beautiful thing, Bucky thought, watching the simple action as warmth rushed through his chest.

Bucky met his eye. "I've always been your friend but-I've changed."

Steve nodded in agreement. "You have."

“The thing is,” Bucky paused, drawing in a breath and watching the other, “I want more.” He saw Steve’s eyes widen but he continued wanting to convey that everything that happened led them to this. “Things have changed and I want you. All of you.”

Steve blinked before a grin stretched across his mouth. “Bucky, that’s been going through my mind for a long time.” Steve looked dazed, eyes bouncing around, not focusing on the other man for very long.

He released a breath that he’d been holding. Tension rose through his frame, this was good, he thought, progress; however, it felt off, lacking weight. Steve wasn’t even looking at him. “Okay.” He could see the color fading around him and he tied to keep breathing through the ache in his chest. This was Steve letting him down easy. “I get it,” he said, eyes looking away from Steve’s stunned face.

Steve let out a huff, face going frustrated. He reached for Bucky’s shoulders; warm hands anchoring him, making him meet Steve’s eyes. “You’re a different person then who you were, but so am I. We’ve both changed; you don’t go into the army and fight in a war to come out the same as you went in.”

“For us more than most, huh?” Bucky whispered, willing himself to stay strong and to hear the other man out. He looked to his mismatched hands and all he can picture is the asset he’d been created to be. Maybe he’d changed too much, was that what Steve was trying to tell him?

Steve’s hands slid down from his shoulders, catching Bucky’s hands, holding both like they were precious, like they were not weapons that had destroyed. “What I’m trying to say and failing miserably is that along the way I fell in love with you all over again. I want you, too, Bucky, all of you.”

Relief crashed over Bucky and words ceased to form but he looked at the other’s beaming face and knew it was right. He tried to speak through the buzz of elation that surged through him. “That’s good.” He felt Steve squeeze his hands and could not help but relax into the dizzying feeling of delight. He knew he was returning the smile that’s illuminating the Steve’s, could feel it in the tugging of his cheeks.

Steve broke first, ducking his head to release a soft laugh. “Yeah, I hope it’s good.”

He sounded relieved and Bucky felt this chest throb in sympathy. They were more like in this that he imagined.

“It’s very good.” Bucky can’t stop grinning at Steve; heart pounding triple time and feeling tension slip away, like liquid through his fingers. He didn’t even realize how much he’d anticipated this, how much he needed it.

Feeling encouraged he slid from the other’s grip and places his flesh hand by Steve’s jaw, never one to do things half-way, he bodily leaned forward to meet that smiling mouth.

His lips are soft and Bucky can taste the champagne from the party and wondered if the other could taste the bitter tobacco of his cigarettes. It’s chaste and warm, everything he’d imagined Steve being. Sighing, Steve brought his free hand up to comb through the loose ponytail of Buck’s hair. Tilting the angle he felt Steve take his lower lip. Bucky was almost shocked at the easy pleasure a simple kiss could bring. He can’t recall the last time he’d felt this and wondered if this was going to turn into an addiction.

He hoped so; there were not enough addictions that were good for him, after all.

It was everything he'd expected from Steve, slow and sweet, and everything Bucky wasn't. They were opposites when it came to a lot but always compatible, always going the same direction. He felt warmth bloom inside his chest with that thought and can't help the laugh that wells from his throat. Breaking the kiss, he released the breathless noise, causing Steve to look at him, cheeks flushed with a mixed expression of fondness and amusement.

Running his hands down Steve's chest, he felt the hard muscles and allowed a sly grin to cross his face. He boldly pulled the blonde close to run his stubble over that smooth face. He felt his oldest friend chuckle at the sensation, hands coming to settle around Bucky's waist as Steve reclaimed his lips with a soft noise. Bucky could feel the boldness of Steve's tongue at his bottom lip and immediately parted his mouth, welcoming the other inside.

He's getting lightheaded, need and desire coursing through him. He couldn't control his hands as they bunched in Steve's shirt, craved this closeness and needed it like a man who's been locked away in shadows and Steve was the sun that he'd been without. His hands shook in giddiness as Steve broke the kiss.

"So," Steve asked, breathe a warm caress against Bucky's lips, "still good?"

Bucky grinned and looked around. "Could use a change of scenery."

He laughed, not fighting it when Steve immediately hauls him in the direction of the bedroom.

*

He wondered if there was such a thing as too close. Being small and compact for better part of a month must have really pushed all the sense out of Steve's head because there was no way Bucky could take this type of cuddling. No matter how much the blond tried there was no way he was fitting comfortably on top of him and tucking his blonde head under Bucky's chin.

Wincing at a particular move he gave into the desire and shoved the bigger man off.

"Hey," Steve protested, hurt puppy eyes shining with alarm as he rolled onto his back.

Moving quickly Bucky set his thighs alongside the others torso, coming to rest on top of him. "It ain't gonna work, Rogers, so stop trying to make me into your personal pillow pancake."

Steve's face twisted in confusion. "Pillow Pancake?"

"Yeah, because you're squashing me." Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve, eyeing his kiss swollen lips as he felt a rush go through him. They'd kissed, necking like teenagers before settling into a relaxing embrace, reacquainting themselves with each other before Steve had made the poor decision to cuddle Bucky a bit too enthusiastically.

Steve tried to look offended. "Are you calling me fat?"

Bucky snorted. "No, I'm calling you heavy."

"You're a jerk," Steve said, eyes twinkling.

Bucky smiled. "Says the punk."

Steve's warm hands creep over Bucky's hips, fingers dipping below the waistband, grinning like a man with a plan.

Rolling his eyes at the others look, Bucky reached up and pulled his shirt off, mouth turning into a smirk at the hungry look that sparked across Steve's face. Feeling encouraged, he settled his full weight onto the other, knowing he could take it, before watching Steve's eyes zero in on his swinging dog tags.

"You still wear them, huh?" Steve's face was incredible as he reached up and ran them through his fingers in a show of reverence.

Bucky's flesh hand went up to cradle them as well, feeling the residual warmth and reading the name and numbers stamped there. Incredibly, they were his original set. Steve was the one who given them to him, having found them after raiding the very laboratory that had been made when he'd been searching for Bucky all those months ago. He felt a shudder run through him and abruptly he's being dragged through freezing snow; he's looking down at his bloody stump of an arm in absolute horror and agony before he heard the whirling of a bone saw.

He blinked and his breathing was too fast, but he managed to meet the worried blue eyes before him, anchoring himself. The phantom pains slipped away as he focused on the room, the warm body below him, and the softness of the mattress. These things grounded him and reminded him that he was not there.

"I'm here, Bucky," Steve said, and cautiously touched Bucky's jaw. "Hey, come back to me."

Drawing in a breath, he let it out, just like Sam had taught him. He slumped, leaning into the hands cradling him, face going blank. "I'm here. S'okay."

Steve cursed but didn't let Bucky's face go. "Me and my big mouth, I'm so sorry, Buck, and to think I was trying to—" he abruptly cut off.

Raising his eyes he saw shame on Steve's face. Now he was curious. "Trying to what?"

The hand slipped away as Steve shrugged. "Forget it."

A pang of hurt shot through him. "No, I don't want to," he said, reaching out with his metal hand to grip Steve's collar. "Tell me, Steve." He needed this, could already feel the memory evaporating and his heightened senses reminding him of the hard body below him. Those memories didn't have a place here, not now, not when he finally had the one thing he'd been dreaming about.

When there was no immediate response, a feeling of defeat edged into his mind making him release the other's collar. He heard Steve let out a breath and then he confessed, "Trying to talk you up," he paused, eyes falling away in disgrace. "I shouldn't when I've been nothing but trouble these days."

The noise he made could have been a growl but Bucky didn't care, not when he saw Steve's head pop up, eyes questioning. "You have not been trouble, so stop thinkin' yourself a burden when you're the opposite of that." Bucky paused, considering. "If anything I'm the one that should be worried about bein' trouble round here."

Steve shook his head, mouth falling into a frown as his hand came up to cover the metal one at his chest. "No, I'm not blind. I see the way me being that skinny kid again affected you. All the trouble with the cube and Loki. You've even been getting more memories. I know it's unsettling." There was uncertainty in his face as if the thought had weighed on his mind for some time now.

"I have all the memories up here." Bucky gestured to his head. "They just come up at interesting times. I've made a good habit of repressing the bad ones, though." His eyes fell to their joined

hands. "All the memories I've been getting these last few days have been good for me. Really good. So don't go blamin' yourself, Stevie. You looking the way you did helped me to see a lot of what I was missing."

Bucky heard the doubt in his tone as Steve asked, "Seriously?"

"Yeah, so I don't want to hear about it. Every memory I get, good and rancid can come at me. I can take it. I've had the therapy to deal with it." It was true, he's have moments but he'd endure and come out stronger.

"I know Natasha and Sam will be glad to hear it," Steve said softly.

Bucky shook his head. Steve just didn't see it, did he? "S'not just them, It's everyone. Since you've dragged my messed up self to this tower I've been getting all types of help. I'm like the perfect charity case for these people."

Steve's voice was hard. "You're not a charity case, Bucky."

Bucky gave him a look. "Steve, everyone here's a little broken in their own way. Doesn't mean we're not good for each other."

Steve's tone was contemplating. "Maybe that's what Loki was talking about when he told us it was inside every one of us."

Bucky didn't answer; too busy watching the man below him. He'd had enough philosophy, he was a simple guy and all he wanted was to take in the attention of the one man who was the center of his universe.

Steve saw him looking and squeezed the hands at his chest before releasing a coy smile.

Bucky took that as a green light and wiggled on top of his friend to get his full attention, feeling a sly smile cross his face. "So what kind of talking up were you thinkin' about doing?" He allowed his eyes to go half-lidded. "Because if you were thinkin' about telling me you were going to be fuckin' me into the mattress and sucking on these tags I just want to say, I would not be adverse to such activities. Besides," he tightened his thighs for emphasis, "I always like makin' new memories, especially if they're the good kind."

"I thought-I mean," Steve stuttered as his face became a lovely shade of pink, "I always imagined you givin' it to me."

Heat slammed though his belly as a soft laugh escaped him. Their minds were not far from each other's trail of thought it seemed. "There's no set rules, Stevie," he flashed a grin, "there's always next time." He brought his flesh hand up to cradle the other's jaw before leaning down as he whispered, "I just really want to feel you inside me first, okay?"

Bucky felt the other breathe a warm 'yes' against his mouth before closing the space between them. It was a deep kiss, picking up right where they had left off from their enthusiastic make-out session, something Bucky cackled inwardly at, not having locked lips and stolen kisses like that in ages.

Panting Bucky broke away, slipping his flesh hand into the short hair at the nape of Steve's neck before catching that bottom lip between his teeth and sucking. He grinned into the action, loving the thought of getting drunk off the other. Releasing the lip, he admired his work, definitely favoring Steve's red swollen lips and panting mouth. Bucky saw that his pupils are blown wide; making him look like Steve was already intoxicated off the other.

Running his tongue over his own lips, he tasted expensive champagne and cheap cigarettes, grinning at the unique combination. Steve's hands ran over his arms, bringing Bucky back down towards him. Bucky bypassed his lips, dragging his stubble over Steve's neck instead; loving the way he released a laugh at the prickly sensation. He ran his metal fingertips along the other's clean shaved jaw grinning cheekily at the heated look Steve shot him.

Bucky saw something flash in Steve's eyes before that big hand is at Bucky's scalp, pulling the tie loose, releasing his hair, and cupping the back of his head. Taking the opening, Steve dragged Bucky closer, lips meeting in another open mouthed kiss.

Pulling apart they grinned at each other as Bucky's eyes go half-lidded, adoring the feeling of Steve's hand in his hair, tugging gently and exposing his neck where Steve's lips sucked.

The sensation was instantaneous and a livewire of heat curled in Bucky's belly. He gripped Steve's free wrist a little too tightly but he knew his friend could take it. Besides, he couldn't help himself. He felt a longing, a need to take the other inside him, to be grounded in the fact that this was real, that Steve wanted him too.

When Steve's mouth left his neck he released a groan of frustration, body straining upward, seeking more. He's about to protest when he saw Steve reaching for his shirt, throwing the fabric to the side and giving Bucky a view of that flushed chest.

A dusting of hair can't conceal the white scars lingering along Steve's side and old bullet wounds, those he'd caused when he's been a different person, lingered over the abdomen. Still, Steve had nothing to be ashamed about in any sense. He never had, Bucky thought, and his fingertips slid along the other's sides in a soft caress.

That's when he saw he was trembling, eagerness making his body move without his control. Breathing hard he shifted his weight, bringing his bottom into contact with the very obvious erection inside the blonde's jeans before settling on Steve's powerful thighs. He released the grip he had on the other's midriff to settle his fingers along the button fly, teasing the fastenings.

Steve raised an eyebrow and allowed a sly smile. "It's not like you've never seen it before."

"But this time I'll be putting it in my mouth," Bucky said without a hint of shame.

An impish smile settled over Steve's mouth. "Well, if you must." He gave a mock look of exasperation but its effect is lost at the heated look that shines through.

Grinning, Bucky's fingers worked on the buttons, heart quickening with each pop, revealing a pair of modest blue boxers. He couldn't help but silently marvel at the esthetically pleasing image the color makes on the other man, or it could be the fact that it's his favorite shade on his favorite person. But he doesn't want blue fabric, he wants skin.

Boldly he palmed the hard length through the thin material, listening to Steve suck in a breath, he smiled. Leaning down, he peppered the impressive hipbone with kisses before nuzzled a muscular thigh, feeling the hardened length through the fabric. He bypassed where he knows Steve wants to be touched in favor of burying his face against the other man's belly, breathing him in.

He felt Steve's hand swipe the hair away from his forehead and grinned against that taunt stomach. Reaching inside Steve's boxers to take the hard member in hand, he felt the weight of it before wrapping his fingers around the width and pulling it out.

The tip is shining, slippery as slick formed at the slit. He wanted this, more than he could admit.

Running his tongue across his lips, Bucky leaned down to drag his tongue from root to tip, eyes closing as he heard Steve moan and the hand in his hair twitched.

There was no finesse to it, hardly any skill, but Bucky knew what he liked so he made it his mission to see to Steve. This was about them, their give and take, and no one else's. The obstacles of living in Avengers Tower and ranks didn't apply here. Here there were no soldiers, no captains, and certainly no Captain America. It was just two boys from Brooklyn that just happened to lose and find each other; everything else was just tedious details.

He curled the fingers of his flesh hand around the shaft and heard another sharp inhale from Steve as if he thought Bucky had made a joke about sucking him off. He allowed the metal of his left to run over the flat stomach before running up that sharp side, feeling his way with the sensitive plated fingertips.

His mouth lingered at the head, knowing it's most intense there and gently played his lips and tongue across it. It had an unusually heavy weight but the sharp taste didn't faze him, not when he knows he's caused it. He felt the hand in his hair tighten pleasurably before Steve lets out a soft needy sound.

Slowly, he figured out how to set a rhythm that worked for both of them. It's not an ideal pace but Steve still moaned; when Bucky draw back to drag his tongue along the dripping slit its Bucky's name that Steve whispered.

When Bucky hollowed his cheeks and took the hard cock down his throat, he could taste the musk and precome mixed with saliva and that makes Bucky twitch in his pants.

He's couldn't help his own body's response, feeling the thick muscles beneath him and the length in his mouth with the smell of Steve all around him made him hard. He didn't touch himself though, not when he's got his attention on the body below him. No, he couldn't let his need interfere; he wanted to do right by Steve first.

Steve groaned, long and deep from his chest as the metal hand caressed his side in sympathy. His voice is ragged, desperate even. "Bu-" he stuttered, "Buck, shit, I'm gonna-"

Bucky knew and could feel it in the tension that coiled through Steve's thighs and belly. He shifted bringing his left hand to the tensing hip while his flesh settled at the base; taking him deep, as the hand in his hair grips harder. Arching under his lips Steve came, seed flooding over Bucky's tongue and he swallowed it down without thought.

Feeling the release on his tongue, Bucky suddenly wished he'd seen Steve go off. Feeling giddy, he slowly slides his mouth off Steve's cock, trying not to tease but failing as his swollen lips catch on the head, causing Steve to tighten his grip on Bucky's hair one last time before slipping away. He sat back and stretched the muscles of his neck and back, feeling the burn from the position. He's hard in his jeans but adjusted himself, allowing a cunning grin to settle over his face. He was the cat that got the cream as it were.

Steve's eyes were closed, a look of utter bliss shining on his face.

"Next time I'm going to watch you come." Bucky leaned in to steal a kiss. "Bet you look gorgeous."

"That was," Steve started, still looking euphoric before sighing. "You really don't have to do that." He finally opened his eyes and Bucky saw that they were almost black. "Besides, you're the gorgeous one."

He snorted in disbelief. "Naw, you've got all the pretty, Stevie, just like how you got all the stupid." A wicked grin flashed at the thought of a joke he'd heard in this new era. "I hear it's a blonde thing."

Steve frowned, sitting up as he took Bucky's face in his hand, cradling the stubble roughened chin. "No, you're stunning, Bucky." The way Steve looked at him, no words could describe the utter devotion and love in that expression.

It really was extraordinary, Bucky thought, feeling the heat lick at his chest. It was that look that hit him like a freight train; Steve didn't just see one part of him, he saw everything. This is what he meant when he said he fell in love all over again. Steve wanted *everything* when it came to Bucky.

Steve's face softened. "I know you think yourself unworthy, that you have to make up for what the Winter Soldier did but that ain't you, it never was. You're just the guy who went off to war and got everything bad thrown at him and you know what?" The pad of a thumb rubbed lazily near the side of Bucky's eye. "Through all that blood and horror we found each other again. That's what makes you so stunning; you survived."

Bucky's mind flickered to before; the months after Steve had given him the cube and his struggle to accept himself and Steve's friendship. "I had to get back to you."

"I was the same you know. It was either bring you home or have nothing," Bucky shot Steve an incredible look. "Don't give me that look. You're all I had at one point, even now; you're the one who gets me. All of me."

"I'm not always the best choice and this is getting sentimental." Bucky ducked his head, willing the flush away.

Steve beamed. "I love you, Buck, you know I'm with you till the end--"

"Of the line, yeah, yeah." His face felt hot and he knew he was beet red but he looked up, catching the other man's gaze. "Me too, Steve."

He saw those blue eyes darken before Bucky swallowed. So much sentimentality and he felt like he was going to cry. It was beyond annoying.

Suddenly those long fingers cradled the back of his head and Steve brought him forward for a deep kiss that left him keening in the back of his throat. Bucky went pliant, a slow thrill going through him at the motion of Steve's tongue. Of course it would be like this, wanting everything at once. He could never get enough of Steve.

Bucky moaned as the kiss was broken, unconsciously his free hand had wandered down to the clasp of his jeans where his swollen length was still confined. It's like a switch had been flipped, because Bucky's suddenly on his back and before he could tense hands were already tugging his jeans off, leaving him in a skimpy pair of tight boxers. He felt something sharp hit his calf but ignores it as Steve sits back, admiring his work.

"I've never been with another guy," Steve said, eyes drinking him in.

"Well it's a good thing I knew a few deviant women back in the day." He barked out a laugh at the thought. "Just get some lube and go slow with me."

Steve didn't move but he's flushed a beautiful shade of red, jaw squaring. "I know what I like."

Heat slammed into Bucky at the thought. "Seriously, Stevie?" It wasn't like he was blind to self-

pleasure but to imagine his best friends doing that particular action to get himself off was almost too much. He swallowed eyes falling to Steve's fingers that were gripping onto Bucky's hips and can't help but image them slippery and between Steve's muscular thighs. God, had Steve been imagining him doing that?

Tearing his gaze away before he did something stupid and come in his pants, he looked to his friend. Steve's face was still flaming and he'd acquired a guilty look around the edges indicating that Bucky was not that far off in his assumptions. Bucky practically lets out a growl. "Get the lube."

As Steve reached into the side table, Bucky took the moment to breathe, feeling the heat swirl through his belly and to his aching cock, arching against the space Steve had left. It been a long, long time and he was more than ready.

Thankfully he didn't have to wait long because Steve was back and peeling the last of the fabric off of Bucky and that's when he felt how overdressed the other was. Bucky leaned up only to be shoved back down.

He was stunned before his eyes narrowed at the hand lingering over his pectoral. "You're not fuckin' me with your pants on, Rogers." His eyes softened, seeing a familiar look on Steve's face. "I'm not going anywhere." He gave him a reassuring look, it wasn't like he was going to move, not when he was right where he wanted to be.

Steve nodded, watching him intensely. "I know," he said, and slowly withdrew his hand before discarding the rest of his clothing. Returning to him Steve stole a kiss that had Bucky gasping, mismatched hands running across the blonde's powerful back muscles.

Biting his lip, Bucky pushed on the other's shoulder encouraging moving, to do anything. Getting the hint, Steve broke the kiss before running his mouth along Bucky's sternum and laving the dip of his navel. The action caused Bucky to laugh, head falling back against the fathered pillows.

Feeling the other's grin against his hip, Bucky clenched his eyes shut when Steve sucked at a particular spot. The sensation went straight to his hardened length, making a small bead of liquid to dribble down the side.

That's when he felt Steve part his thighs, coming to kneel between them as a slick slide of fingers pressed against his rim, drawing slow circles. Steve took his time, allowing Bucky to relax before a digit found its way inside.

Bucky's hands clenched at the sensation, heat cascading over his chest and neck as a blush covered his cheeks. He couldn't help it, it was an unusual feeling, but strangely good, one Bucky had always wondered about when girls made him use the same hole.

As Steve added a second finger, Bucky gasped, feeling the warm wet breathe of Steve's kiss at his hip and sensitive inner thigh. The fingers went deeper, stretching him open, making him ready for what was to come.

It was a slow process and Bucky felt Steve's eyes, watching and assessing, taking his time in every sense of the word. It was driving Bucky mad as his aching cock lay hard and glistening over his navel.

Steve had started sucking another purple mark on his inner thigh when he felt it, a jolt of pleasure that sparked through him like white static. He swore, hips jolting, causing Steve to pull off his half-finished mark.

“Feel good?” he asked like he already knew.

Steve hit that spot again because he was a bastard like that.

“Yeah, fuck, feels real good,” Bucky moaned.

He remembered what Steve said earlier and imagined the blonde doing this to himself, taking his time to open his body, fingers searching out that same spot. It’s enough to have Bucky moaning, arching his hips into the other man.

Humming Steve’s fingers slid out, caressing the rim as they go, making Bucky squirm in frustration. He heard the slick of the lube cap before Steve rose up, mouthing along Bucky’s throat and jaw before claiming a kiss.

Those strong hands grasped his thighs lifting him into position and fitting his legs over Steve’s thighs. That was when Bucky could see Steve was just as hard as him. He blinked in astonishment at the recovery speed. Bucky might just come to love what that serum did to Steve’s body after all.

“This all alright?” Steve asked.

Feeling dazed, Bucky could only nod. He’s never been one for man handling but he might have found another kink when it came to Steve. His friend did say he knew what he liked after all. He’d obviously been thinking about this aspect for some time.

Those long stick fingers brushed Bucky’s rim again before something bigger, wider nudged its way to his slacked hole. Bucky tried to keep his breathing even; this was not the time to start wheezing like an asthmatic, as Steve slowly pushed his cock inside him.

Bucky felt a sense of fullness as the hot throbbing length pressed in before Steve bottomed out and it’s all he can do to keep breathing.

He heard Steve curse, head dropping down to his chest and Bucky can feel him trembling, holding back as tension vibrates under Bucky’s thighs.

There was no fumbling just a slow glide of pulling back, then pushing in again, before Steve stills, breathe coming short and fast. Bucky heard his friend say his name and can’t help the heat that passed over his face. He’d done this, undone Steve to the point of whispering his name in a quietness that was normally reserved for prayer.

Strong hands were at his hips and Bucky bit his lip, feeling their uncontrolled twitching. He wanted to know what Steve was thinking but the blissed expression and taunt frame were a good indication that Steve was hardly holding on.

A thought crossed his mind. He always enjoyed riling Steve, why not now? Feeling wicked, Bucky arched his back, slowly, slowly pushing up into a grind and then down, causing Steve’s eyes to fly open, an electric look of wonder in those sea-like depths.

Steve gripped Bucky’s hips harder, making Bucky’s breathe catch, and neck twist. Seeing the reaction Steve cocked his head. “God, you’re somethin’ else, huh?”

“You bet your-” he cut off with a groan when Steve found that spot inside, making sparks fly and his jaw clench.

Adjusting his hold, Steve widened the space between the Bucky’s thighs before starting the push and pull over again, thrusting faster without pause.

Unconsciously his hands wound themselves in the sky-blue sheets under his body, feeling the shift of the mattress as Steve pounded into him and created a rhythm that had him arching, meeting the other thrust after thrust. He's flushing red, his mouth gasping as his back arched when that spot is hit, mouth open and eyes clenching at every brush. His cock's laid out, leaking and hard in neglect.

But he wanted more.

"Harder," Bucky gasped, tongue coming out to lick dry lips. Steve let out a groan in response before the grip around his hips tightened even more, sure to leave marks, but Bucky didn't care. No he wanted the reminder.

The rhythm of their hips faltered, making Bucky whine; however Steve kissed his neck, mumbling reassurances against the flesh that had Bucky panting. Their movement quickened and he heard the slap of their thighs as that hard cock filled him and it was good, so good when those sparks of pleasure started happening more and more. Distantly he felt something pointy at his side but he ignored it in favor of tightening his grip at the tearing sheets.

That was when Bucky saw Steve watching him, a look of astonishment on his face as if Steve still didn't believe he was doing this with him. Something flicked across those blue eyes and before Bucky could figure out when it meant Steve was ducking down, taking the chain of Bucky's dogtags in his mouth.

The air left Bucky's lungs as Steve slid the links through his lips before ending up with one of the metallic tags between his teeth. He grinned audaciously, before following through on his promise and sucking one of Bucky's identification tags into his mouth. It was almost too much when he felt Steve matching the slide of his cock with the motion of the metal in his mouth.

"C'mere," Bucky gasped and Steve dropped the spit soaked tags, lips meeting Bucky's as the pace of their hips continued. He felt too much and knew he just needed a little *more*. Unclenching a hand from the sheets he reached for his straining cock. Fingers slid in the slickness of the precome as he lazily circled the head before grasping it.

Steve broke the kiss to stare at the action, eyes going half lidded as he watched Bucky's hand glide over his aching member. He's just short of breathe as his orgasm seized him, mouth falling open in a silent shout as his shoulders tense. He felt his thighs tighten around Steve, leaving him straining against the rocking mattress as come floods over his fist and belly. He didn't see Steve's eyes widen in amazement but he did feel when he picks up the pace.

His eyes fell shut as pleasure pulsed through him, leaving him boneless. He weakly pumped his hips in the aftershocks, not giving up the rhythm, not until Steve followed him. It didn't take long and after a handful of thrusts Steve's coming, warm sticky fluid filling Bucky's channel. He opened his eyes and smiled, taking in the dazed and blissed expression that's plastered over Steve's face.

He was sure his expression wasn't much different as he felt the too long hair plastered to the side of his face as he allowed himself to be shifted as Steve's dick slipped from his body. It's almost too much and he felt himself shiver at the wet sensation.

Steve didn't fall to his side but hovers over him, stealing a slow open mouthed kiss. It should be overwhelming, bordering on suffocating, but it's not, it's sweet and overly sentimental. It had Steve Rogers written all over it.

Bucky followed those lips with his own before he reached up with his flesh hand to grasp at the blonde's hair, but pulled away in realization, irritation making him frown.

He looked down at the come covered metal hand that was resting at is belly and cursed himself for being so carless. Steve's gaze followed his and that soft look on his face only become impish.

"Wow, Buck, that is seriously hot."

"Shut the fuck up, Steve." Bucky would not let embarrassment get to him. "You know how hard it is getting come out of the metal joint plates?"

His only response was a warm laugh into his shoulder and a wet playful kiss to the underside of his stubble covered jaw.

*

"I know things with Tony are not," Steve paused for the right word as Bucky raises a curious eyebrow, "easy." He shoots Bucky a hopeful look from his propped position against the headboard. The sergeant was across from him, legs crossed, sheet a tangle that just barely pressured his modesty.

Bucky snorted, fiddling with the matchbook that had fallen amongst the sheets. "Stark knows my past and he knows what I," he paused, striking a spark with his metal hand, "what the Winter Soldier did to his parents." Glancing up, he caught Steve's look, before snuffing out the flame between his fingers. "But I know he's got no desire to be my friend and that's fine with me." He tossed the snuffed match aside and ignored the others look of disapproval.

Steve sighed. "I just wish--"

"No need," Bucky cut in, "we have respect and that's good enough. I got his back in a fight and he's got mine. We do what we can to keep our teammates alive." He didn't mention the fact that he was still pissed off about what Tony said about Steve being an experiment, but that was something he wanted to keep close to his chest. No need for the blonde to know that Bucky planned to *talk* with Stark about running his mouth like that.

Steve nodded; an unhappy but accepting look crosses his face. Leave it to the good Captain to want his teammates to be buddy-buddy, Bucky thought.

"You can if you want," Steve said, eyes falling to the matchbook Bucky was twiddling with.

He shrugged. "Natasha took my smokes."

Steve's face became sheepish, hand coming up to rub at his neck self-consciously.

Bucky cocked his head. "What?"

Instead of answering Steve reached into the side table and rummaged through the drawer. When the younger man straightened back up, Bucky saw Steve hold up a pack of the other soldier's favorite brand.

Bucky grinned. "Where did you get these?" he asked, taking the cigarettes in hand. Half the sticks were missing but Steve never smoked, not unless he was coerced by Bucky. It suddenly hit him that the last time he saw Steve smoke was in France, a lifetime ago.

Not meeting his eyes Steve took the matches. "You remember those eight months you were on a mission slash rehabilitation conditioning with Clint, Sam, and Natasha?" Seeing Bucky nod, he continued, "I nearly went insane without you here," a shadow of anguish passed over his features, "I just needed a little something of you to keep me going."

Bucky smiled, leaning close to. “Seriously?” He held up the pack.

“I just got you back after two years and I know you were half...” Bucky shot him a look of disbelief and Steve sighed. “Fine, mostly out of your mind, but then you were just gone again. It kept me grounded, knowing you were here. I smoked them in your honor, you could say.”

Astonishment and affection churned through Bucky as he observed his lover. Steve had never told him about what he’d done when he was gone and Bucky never asked. It never ceased to amaze him how much Steve could surprise him, even after everything that had become of them. Chuckling he pulled a stick out before throwing the pack to the side. He uncrossed his legs, coming to kneel before him, lips around the filter as he looked to Steve in expectation.

Bucky watched as the head of a matchstick spark and a flame rose up inside Steve’s cupped hands. Steve moved forward and their eyes met as the flame lit the tip. Not breaking the look, Bucky breathed in the bitter tobacco, triggering the tip to turn cherry red before slowly moving back as thin white smoke curled around his face and mouth. They watched each other before Steve’s eyes slipped down to the others lips, the look of want clear.

A pang shot through Bucky’s chest at that, eyes going half-lidded before an idea emerged. He breathed deep before removing the cigarette with his metal hand. Leaning forward, he met the waiting mouth before him and opened his lips, allowing smoke to follow his tongue, sharing the flavor with the kiss.

Steve changed the angle and their foreheads touched as their lips separated, causing the warm white wisps to escape. His panting was shallow but Bucky didn’t care, not when all he could see was cobalt blue. A cheeky grin split his face as Steve’s eyes darkened, hungry for more.

Laughing at his own foolishness Bucky held the burning cigarette for Steve, watching him take a slow drag. Those blue eyes never leaving the sergeant. Hazy vapors lingered around their heads as they took turns breathing the nicotine.

Steve’s eyes never seemed to leave him and Bucky’s thoughts raced as heat spread through his belly. It seemed he had his Captain’s attention and there was no way he was ever going to allow it to go unanswered.

Chapter End Notes

My [tumblr](#)

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I want to, once again, thank [shanachie](#). They were my stealthy beta reader for this part as well! :)

Bucky watched breathlessly as he fucked Steve, eyes never straying too far from those gasping lips and glazed eyes. Steve was stunning, in the way his hips jerked whenever Bucky managed to rub him just right inside, or the way those small mewls escaped his lips, and in every other way.

And Bucky could only take so much. He knew he could lose himself easily, especially when Steve sighed his name in that breathless way. He tried to be careful, to go slow but it was nearly impossible and it wasn't lack of technique by far, but to have Steve watching him, all his focus on Bucky made something inside him wild, uncontrolled. He thrived on that attention and he would do anything to keep the Steve looking at him like that because it was like the sun had finally appeared over a deluged land.

Feeling high from that thought, he leaned down to tease Steve as his hands wandered. It was all he could do to keep the pace fluid as he attempted to gain his fill of the man below him. At the same time Bucky knew he had to make this good, tear Steve apart only to build him back up with every thrust of his cock.

Bucky could already feel himself slipping and slowed the pounding pace of his hips, hitting *just there* to see those blue eyes slam shut, clenching in pleasure. Steve moaned in frustration when Bucky continued to pause as those muscular lags wrapped around him began to shake in tension.

Steve peeked through his lashes and Bucky could not stop the impish grin before he twisted his hips, leaving the man choking on air.

He didn't pull out, just enjoyed the feeling of filling Steve up, loving the way the hot skin under his hands shuddered in pleasure.

"You-" Steve gasped, "you're tryin' to kill me. Come on, Barnes."

"Naw, just enjoying the view, Stevie," he followed a drop of sweat with his eyes before tracing it with his tongue, hips grinding at a slow pace. Bucky wanted to make him shout. He wanted to make it last. The thought brought a wicked smile over his lips as he pulled out completely, making Steve moan in frustration, before slamming back in, listening to the chocked off noise Steve made.

He really did make the best noises, Bucky thought. Things like that could give a man a complex.

"Buck, come on, I need-" Steve trailed off, hands splaying over Bucky's hips and he clawed at him in desperation, sure to leave marks.

"I know what you need," he said, sloppily kissing Steve's neck, grinding his hips in a circular motion that had Steve clenching his eyes again.

Bucky's elbows settled on either side of Steve's head, bracketing him in, breathing the same humid air and allowing Bucky to watch a bead of sweat slide down Steve's temple. Licking his lips

Bucky licked at Steve's panting mouth, studiously ignoring that heated steel gaze.

"Do you really?" Steve asked, challenge dripping in his tone.

Bucky's eyes snapped to Steve's seeing that euphoric expression outlined with a dare; he could not have that.

"Yeah, I do." He hummed, nipping along that solid jawline before whispering into Steve's ear, "You need everything, Stevie, and I'm gonna give you everything." Then he emphasized his words by picking up his pace, focusing the angle, bringing friction to Steve's cock, which laid dripping between their bodies.

Arching his back, Steve bit his lips, one hand twisting in the sheets while another found purchase at Bucky's metal shoulder, fingers turning white where they pressed against cool steel.

Feeling Steve tighten around him Bucky adjusted his grip only to hear the whirl of recalibration. Before the shame could make him still he heard Steve release a loud groan, hips stuttering. Eyes widening Bucky nearly lost his position before gaining his equilibrium. He could only stare at Steve in wonder almost tempted to point out the other's reaction but stopped when he saw the way Steve was looking at him, like Bucky was his world, his compass in life; as if where Bucky went Steve followed.

That look had Bucky gasping, and leaning down he caught Steve's mouth in a kiss, eyes squinting to lock the image away, were Bucky could revisit it over and over again. As he pulled away he saw Steve was shaking beneath him, desperate for the end. Bucky wasn't going to deny him, not when his own body was staining, teetering on the edge.

Reaching out with his flesh hand Bucky ran his fingers over Steve's dripping slit, feeling the sticky liquid there before stroking the throbbing length. He played with the foreskin for a moment before giving him a firm stroke, once, twice, and then Steve was releasing a hitched gasp, body tightening as his orgasm leaked hot over Bucky's fingers.

Feeling the other man slack Bucky gave into the heat that was burning through his core; he thrust a handful of time before spilling his release inside Steve. Once the hazy pleasure subsided he pulled away, warm length slipping from Steve's body before resting on top of Steve, feeling their heartbeats descend to a more natural rhythm.

Bucky rested his nose at the hollow of his lover's throat inhaling the salty smell of sweat and sex. It was made better by the underlines scent of *Steve*, something that never changed, no matter the shape of his body.

He was dozing, feeling the pleasure humming through him, his eyes were only half focused on the curve of Steve's neck and collarbone when he felt Steve sigh.

"Okay," Steve started, hand running through Bucky's sweaty nap, peeling his shoulder length hair from his neck, "you really do know how to give a guy everything he needs, huh?"

Instead of answering Bucky claimed Steve's mouth, eyes falling shut in utter contentment.

*

"I'm not exactly the boyfriend type," Bucky said as he ran his finger over Steve's shoulder. He was resting against his lover's broad back, admiring the powerful muscles there. They'd woken like that, after a short doze and neither of them had felt the need to move, too content to stay like this, skin to skin, legs intertwined. It wasn't like a couple of super-soldiers needed a lot of sleep

anyways.

Steve hummed but didn't lift his head from his arms. "Never was with the same dame twice."

Kissing the nap of Steve's neck, Bucky tightened his grip over the other's side. "You ain't a dame, Steve, I would know."

Steve chuckled. "Yeah, don't think I look good in a dress."

Bucky found a scar, not one that he'd given Steve but it was a reminder of himself, of what he could do and what he had done. What he could *still* do. "Not a very good man, you know this."

Suddenly Bucky was on his back for the second time that night. He looked up at Steve but this time all he could see was determination and hurt. "You're a great man."

"Stevie--"

"No, you listen to me. No one had ever treated me like you did, Bucky. You were the first. That's how I know you're a good man. All anyone ever saw before was a skinny kid picking fights and now, in this time, they see Captain America. You've always been different. You see me; it's all you've ever done."

Bucky was speechless, captivated by those pleading blue eyes. How could he not see him? Steve was Bucky's world.

Again he said, "You're a good man, Bucky, and I'll make sure you start to believe that too. Now stop trying to sabotage this before it even gets going."

"I'm not trying to--" Bucky started.

Steve was having none of it. "Yes, you are. I'll have Natasha knock some sense into you if I have to. She'll really tell you how it is and then Sam will be there to clean up the bruises and give you another ear full." Steve nodded to himself as if he knew just how truthful that threat was.

"Okay, okay. I give," Bucky said, then paused, face scrunched. "Does Natasha know about you're..." he trailed off, not about to say the word *feelings* if he could help it. It just felt wrong, like what Steve felt for him could be continued with a commonplace word.

Steve turned pink around the edges. "She kind of told me to go for it but I was still apprehensive. I mean, you're my best friend! I can handle a punch to the face but I didn't want you hating me for having certain thoughts or somethin'." His eyes darted away for a moment before locking back with Bucky's. "I can't lose you. So I just ignored it the best I could."

Bucky felt the air lodge in his throat. Just how long had Steve been feeling like this? Had he wanted this as long as Bucky or had he pinned for longer. He swallowed at the thought. "She helped me too, kind of told me to get it together."

"See, you're braver than me," Steve said with a grin.

Bucky snorted, hands rubbing Steve's biceps. "More stupid you mean."

Steve beamed. "Now we'll be stupid together."

Silently Bucky agreed. It wasn't like he's ever let Steve run into the fray without him, now it seemed more than ever that it would go both ways. "If it helps I'll have your back."

Steve raised an eyebrow. "Follow me anywhere?"

Smiling Bucky's eyes turned half-lidded, like their paths were ever going to diverge again. Of course he would, but he wasn't going to go easy on his guy. "As long as you got the uniform."

Steve mirrored Bucky's look. "I think I can live with your uniform kink."

"I'll wear mine if it helps," Bucky said, and tilted his head giving Steve a considering look.

Steve's eyes lit up. "You better."

Bucky grinned as his eyes fell to Steve's lips before the other took the hint and descended. Steve rolled to Bucky's side and nuzzled his neck, kissing the scarred skin where flesh met metal, making Bucky shiver at the sensation. Then again it just might be because it was Steve.

"So a Titan, huh?" he asked, feeling cheeky but knowing the weight behind his word. "Apparently you're pretty special, too, Rogers. Who could have guessed?"

Steve rolled his eyes. "I'm pretty sure you guessed that about hundred years ago."

"Yeah, yeah I did," he said, tone turning wistful.

Steve noticed the shift and caught Bucky's eye. "We'll take whatever they throw at us."

Bucky saw the determination in those eyes and it was the same, no matter what shape Steve was in those eyes would become fire and that jaw would square with an unmatched resolve. It was that expression that would be a permanent reminder that Steve never did change even as his body did. It was always that inside that Bucky loved the most. "You're the same as always."

"A good thing?" Steve asked, cocking his head.

Bucky smiled, knowing everything had been worth it. He had Steve by his side and a team of Avengers at their back.

"The best."

And it was the truth.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

I want to thank my beta reader [shanachie](#). Seriously, they dealt with a LOT of my tense issues.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Epilogue

Stark was muttering to himself again. Coincidentally the screwdriver he was holding was coming a bit too close to Bucky's face for comfort. Not wanting to be accidentally poked (again) he shifted away causing Tony to curse as the tweezers he was holding inside a panel tumbled to the floor.

"Damn it, Barnes." He picked up the fallen tool. "You've got to work with me here. I'm used to tinkering with things that *don't* run away from me." His eyes ran over the metal arm again. "Nor, are they attached to the human nervous system." He threw the tools on a side table before running his hands over his face.

Bucky looked over the exposed wires and gears before closing the small panel Tony had opened. "Not in the mood for getting stabbed in the eye with a screwdriver is all." He sagged in the seat, not sure why he's bothering with the maintenance. He'd come here for a good reason, he needed to tell Tony about the change in his relationship. Telling Tony was not his idea, mind you. Bucky was here on Steve's insistence, but somehow he end up being talked into an upgrade for the sake of the Avengers.

When Tony had been working on Bucky's arm before, he'd noticed the lag in his recalibration and wanted to quote 'take a look under the hood' to get a better idea of what the problem was when Bucky had the time. Now he had found the time and was playing nice, wanting to extend a tentative olive branch for the sake of Steve and his honest to God whining about his team not being buddy-buddy.

Removing his hands Stark sat back, observing the hunched figure. "Interesting things you got in there. A lot of advanced technology given that it was fabricated in the 40's." He gestured to the arm. "Those Russians kept you up-to date; you were ahead of the field when it came to advanced weaponry."

Bucky shrugged, arms crossing over his chest. He didn't care. All that mattered was that the arm gave him the ability to protect his team and himself and Steve. "More advanced than what you've created?"

Tony gave him an insulted look. "Please, it's *almost* as good as what I would have done."

Bucky raised an eyebrow, not allowing the other's boasting to grate his nerves. If Stark liked to talk about machines and technology he would hear him out and sound interested. He'd come in peace and wanted to keep it that way for the sake of Steve and his big blue puppy eyes. "Oh, really?" he said with a forced look of interest.

Stark paused, looking him over once again before snorting a laugh. “You’re here because Cap told you to make nice, huh?”

He let the interest slip off his face. “Is it that obvious?”

“Glaringly.” Tony fiddled with the tools before playfully rolling his stool back. “I know you can drink and actually feel it, unlike our good Captain, but do you like scotch, Barnes? I mean, I know you’ve got the whole...” He gestured to Bucky’s head. “Russia Motherland thing going on sometimes, but you look like a man who appreciates a good scotch more than vodka.”

There was no denying that Bucky enjoyed alcohol, especially when he was dealing with people who rubbed him wrong. “I do.”

Tony squinted at him. “Good, let’s go bond over something that’ll inebriate us.” He stood and waited for Bucky to don his shirt before heading to the elevator. “I always found that if you’re drunk enough, anyone can learn to get along.”

Bucky saw Stark give him a small cocky grin.

The former assassin wanted to do this, he wanted to get past his hang-up but he needed to do something first. “Steve told me what you said about him,” he said, coming to stand before Stark.

The smile slipped from Tony’s face. “I say a lot of things. If you haven’t noticed my mouth tends to run away from me.”

The elevator opened but neither of them moved. “Something along the lines of Steve being an experiment and everything special about him come out of a bottle?” He phrased it like a question but he knows the words, as does the man before him if the stillness is any indication.

He stopped a hairs’ breathe away as his corded and muscular body did the coercing for him. He watched as the color drained from Tony’s face. “If you ever even think something like that about him again,” he cocked his head, “your face will become real intimate with this metal fist of mine.”

Tony swallowed and nodded, not even daring to breathe.

“I’m glad we understand each other,” Bucky says, allowing a grin to cross his face as he stepped around him and into the open elevator. “Now, let’s go see if we can bury the hatchet.”

*

Three bottles of scotch later.

“You know.” Tony slurred from across him, “when I first saw it...” His gaze locked on Bucky’s metal arm like a man on a beautiful woman. “It was all I could do not to, like, get my hands on it. It was so...so...so...” He searched for the right word. “Shiny. Which was really weird because you looked like you’d been sleeping on a park bench for months!”

Bucky snorted but it turned into a laugh.

“Oh, my God, you do laugh!” Stark said, gesturing to grinning man’s face. “I was beginning to think the scowl was a permanent thing.” He laughed to himself before taking a sip and Bucky saw him go serious. “Listen, I got this brunette that I know, really heavy on the pin-up look and could put your Vargas girl’s to shame-“

“I’m with Steve,” he cut Tony off before he heard anything more. It wasn’t like he doesn’t enjoy

the dames; it was just that he was with the one he wanted.

Tony looked comically stunned for a moment before he boldly reached across their makeshift bar to grab Bucky by the shoulders. “Fucking finally!” He shook Bucky lightly before letting go.

Bucky was just glad that he hadn’t felt the need to ripe the other man’s hands off. It must be the scotch, he thought, taking another gulp and finishing the glass.

“I’ll top you off, man,” Stark said, giggling while he rounded the small table to pour the liquid. Huh, Bucky thought, who knew he’d be so eager for friendly after being threatened with a beating.

The glass clanked and Bucky raised an eyebrow. It seemed even when shit-faced Tony was not going to allow a drop of the liquid to go to waste as all the sloppily poured scotch made it inside the glass. He was impressed.

Setting the bottle down, Stark threw an arm around him and Bucky blinked. He smelled the scotch on the man’s breath as he leaned in. “I was this close...” he held his other hand to Bucky’s face, an inch or so of separation between his thumb and index finger. “To locking your floor down and streaming gay porn at you two. I had some real *classy* stuff picked out.”

The way Tony said classy told Bucky that it was anything but.

He continued, still bodily leaning into to the other. “I’m talking farm boys, rent boys, military uniform fetishes...” Bucky’s eyebrow quirked in interest, “and the true *pièce de résistance*,” Tony paused for the imaginary drumroll, “the *Captain America* parody!”

Bucky chocked on his liquor.

“Yeah, don’t worry, I’ll still send it all, pal.” He patted him on the back. “Now you seniors can have fun after you help us save the world from the baddies.” Stark drowned the rest of his glass. “So you have to tell me, Barnes,” he took his arm away from the man’s shoulder but stayed close, “does Steve get hot when you call him Cap in bed? Because if the parody is right, Barton owns me some serious cash.”

Now he was confused and losing his buzz. Something was off. “You talk about my sex life with Barton?”

“Well yeah, he gets his info from Nat,” Tony said it like everyone knew that.

Bucky was going to *murder* someone.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this!

I want to thank you for reading, commenting, leaving kudos, and taking the time to encourage me. Once again I want to thank [shanachie](#).

I’m sorry if it got rocky but I hope the rewrite was effective.

Music that inspired me in writing:

This amazing fanmix for my flashback scenes: <http://8tracks.com/sgtbucky/rewind->

me-to-1942

My [tumblr](#)

End Notes

I wanted pre-serum!Steve and Bucky Post-Winter Soldier and I wanted it to be somehow possible in the MCU. This idea come from that.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!